

WYCLIFFE COLLEGE LIBRARY



3 1761 02869 5773

*AIDS TO THE DEVOUT STUDY OF
CRITICISM*



AIDS TO THE DEVOUT STUDY OF CRITICISM

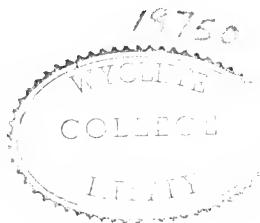
PART I. *THE DAVID-NARRATIVES*

PART II. *THE BOOK OF PSALMS*

BY THE REV

T. K. CHEYNE, M.A., D.D.

ORIEL PROFESSOR OF THE INTERPRETATION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD; CANON OF ROCHESTER



New York:
THOMAS WHITTAKER
2, BIBLE HOUSE

MDCCCXCII

BS

1430

138

45

P R E F A C E .

THE need of a distinctly critical and yet simply and devoutly Christian treatment of the Old Testament for educated persons was forcibly brought home to me when in 1886 I first went into summer residence as a Canon of Rochester. I found an open field, and the only question was whether with an experience gathered first in the university and then in a country parish I could do anything for the busy but thoughtful population of a large town. What I tried to do for such persons I have told them sermon-wise in some pages of this volume (see Part II., Chap. ii.), and I will only say here that one course of sermon-studies, published under the title of *The Hallowing of Criticism*, had the good fortune to be recommended by the beloved Bishop Thorold (then of Rochester, now of Winchester) to his South London clergy. I now publish in a revised and less homi-

letical form, and with the addition of much interwoven illustrative matter, not only the chief of last year's cathedral sermons (those on David and on Psalm li.), but also a selection from those of several previous summers, and I offer them, not only, nor even chiefly, to churchmen of the diocese of Rochester, but to those who, in whatever place or of whatever communion, are pursuing in a devout spirit the critical study of the Scriptures. In short, I venture (encouraged by the opinion of so experienced a teacher as Canon Bernard of Salisbury¹) to hope that what I prepared in the first instance for Rochester may be useful in its present enlarged form to those who take part in the 'higher religious education' elsewhere. The critical analysis of the Books of Samuel happens, for instance, to be at present accessible in no other book.

OXFORD, *Easter Monday*, 1892.

NOTE.—I. The following abbreviations are employed :—

Var. B., 'Variorum Bible.'

A.D., 'Travels in Arabia Deserta,' by C. M. Doughty.
2 vols.

B.L., 'Bampton Lectures on the Psalter.'

2. All the Psalm-studies except those on Ps. li. were originally published in the *Expositor*. The critical matter, however, and the introductory notes, etc., are new.

¹ This opinion only relates to the studies published in the *Expositor*. See Note.

CONTENTS.



	PAGE
PREFACE	V

PART I.—*THE DAVID-NARRATIVES.*

CHAP.

I. HOW THE BOOK OF SAMUEL AROSE	3
II. THE CHARACTER OF DAVID	16
III. THE SAME (<i>continued</i>)	43
IV. DAVID AND GOLIATH	74
V. THE SAME (<i>continued</i>)	98
NOTE ON 2 SAM. XXI. 19	125

PART II.—*THE BOOK OF PSALMS.*

I. THE CRITICAL STUDY OF THE PSALTER	129
II. THE INSPIRATION OF THE PSALMISTS	141
III. PSALM LI.	165
IV. THE SAME	183
V. THE SAME	199
VI. PSALM XXXII.	218
VII. PSALM VIII.	231
NOTE ON PSALMS VIII. AND XXIII.	244

CHAP.	PAGE
VIII. PSALM XVI.	248
NOTE ON PS. XVII. 15	269
IX. PSALM XXIV.	275
X. PSALMS XXVI. AND XXVIII.	291
XI. PSALM LXIII.	308
XII. PSALM LXVIII.	323
NOTE ON PS. LXVIII.	341
XIII. PSALM LXXXVI.	342
XIV. PSALM LXXXVII.	356
XV. PSALMS CXIII.—CXVIII.	375
NOTE ON PS. CX.	391

PART I.

THE DAVID-NARRATIVES.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE BOOK OF SAMUEL AROSE.

CAREFUL narrative composition received a strong impulse from 'the romantic and varied career of David. His predecessor, however heroic, had the limitations of his striking individuality. David, on the other hand, though not as Protean as Edward Irving makes him, was both morally and intellectually flexible and many-sided. He is in fact a national or even a racial type—'le type le plus étonnant peut-être, et le plus achevé de la nature sémitique dans ses belles et dans ses mauvaises parties.'¹ The early story-tellers were dimly conscious of this, and, with all their admiration for David's splendid qualities, were far from concealing his darker side. If 'sincerity' be, as Dean Jackson represents,² a criterion of inspira-

¹ Renan (1855).

² *Works*, i. 37.

tion, the authors or compilers of the biography of David certainly deserve to be called inspired.

It is almost needless to add that the life of David, like the Book (not Books ¹) of Samuel in which it is contained, is of composite origin, and not of equal historical value throughout. At first, as might be expected, the facts of historical or semi-historical tradition and the fictions of a reverent imagination are commingled. It is often so with the early history of the great men of antiquity. But pass on to the period of David's outlawry, and a change becomes visible in the narrative. Its details are so full of primitive naturalness, and so minutely true to the physical features of the scenes of David's wanderings,² that we cannot help deriving the accounts from a very early source, even if we no longer have the traditions in the most original form. Lastly, that important group of narratives which begins with David's generosity to Mephibosheth and ends with the execution of Shimei (2 Sam. ix.-xx., 1 Kings i., ii.) takes a still higher rank, and stands alone among the continuous narrative sections of the Old Testament for picturesqueness, psychological insight, and

¹ As in the case of Kings, the division into two books comes from the Septuagint and the Vulgate, and was first transferred to the Hebrew Bible by Daniel Bomberg (1517-18).

² See Conder's paper on the Scenery of David's Outlaw Life (*Palestine Fund Statement*, Jan. 1875, p. 41, &c. ; reprinted in the *Memoirs*).

above all historical accuracy. Its author deserves our warmest thanks, for he respects the great king so much that he ventures to record even his errors and his sins.

But we cannot study the biography of David by itself. From his first public appearance to the death of Saul, his story blends with the tragic record of his predecessor. We must therefore inquire what manner of man Saul was. Leaving behind us the 'broad rich harvest-fields' of the later narratives, we must ascend to the 'misty highlands' of the remoter past; in short, we must regard the story of Saul's earlier period as the *introduction* to the life of David. We shall thus obtain an unforced division of the Book of Samuel into three parts, viz., 1 Sam. i.-xv. (Samuel and Saul), 1 Sam. xvi.-2 Sam. viii. (Saul and David), 2 Sam. ix.-1 Kings ii. (David and the troubles of the succession). The critical analysis of the book is attended with less difficulty than that of the Hexateuch, but it is only within the last few years that it has reached sufficiently definite results. I give here the results of Kautzsch (well known to many by his own and Socin's excellent analytic edition of Genesis) from his new translation of the Old Testament,¹ prefixing an explanation of the signs.

¹ *Die heilige Schrift des A. T.*, Freiburg i. B., 1891 (in progress).

Je denotes an old account of David, written most probably in Jerusalem, and dating from the time of Solomon or Rehoboam.

Da, another account of David, also written in Judah, and dating from the 10th or 9th century.

S, a Judahite or Benjamite account of Saul, contemporary with the preceding. *S* and *Da* may have one and the same author.

SS, an account of Samuel and Saul, composed, probably in N. Israel, of different traditional elements, and about contemporary with the prophet Hosea.

E, a narrative of the 8th or 9th century, composed in the northern kingdom.

Ju denotes the editor of the Book of Judges in its earlier form. He is post-Deuteronomic.

Dt, the changes introduced into the story of Samuel and Saul under the influence of Deuteronomy.

?, passages of uncertain origin.

R, the editor or editors of the Books of Samuel in their present form.

I SAM.

Da. 16, 14-23. 18, 6-11. 18, 20-27. 20 (basis).
21, 1. 23, 19-25, 44. 27, 1-31, 13.

S. 9, 1-10, 16 (*not* 9, 9). 11, 1 [*see Var. B.*]-15.
13, 1-14, 46 (*mainly*).

SS. 1. 2, 11-26. 3, 1-21. 8. 10, 17-26. 15,
17, 1-18, 5. 18, 12-19. 18, 28-19, 17. 21,
2-10. 22. 23, 1-13. 26. [*On xvii.* 46, 47
see below, pp. 116-118.]

E. 4. 5. 6, 1-7, 1.

Ju. 12. 14, 47-51.

Dt. 2, 27-36. 7, 2-16.

R. 7, 17. 9, 9. 10, 8. 13, 1. 7*b*-15*a*. 19-22.
16, 1-13. 17, 12, 15. 19, 18-24. 20 (*parts*).
23, 14-18 (*and elsewhere*).

? 2, 1-10. 21, 11-16.

2 SAM.

Je. 5, 3-16 (*mainly*). 6, 1-23. 9-20.

Da. 1, 1-4. 17-27. 2, 1-3, 1. 6-5, 2 (*mainly*).
5, 17-25. 21, 15-22. 23, 8-39. 1 Kings 1.
2, 13.

SS. 1, 6-16.

Dt. - 7. 1 Kings 2, 1-9.

R. 1, 5. 8 (*older basis*). 1 Kings 2, 10-12 (*and elsewhere*).

? 3, 2-5. 21, 1-14. 22. 23, 1-7. 24, 1-25.

There is one striking result of the composite origin of Samuel to which it is fitting to refer at this point—I mean the coexistence, here and there, of two different

accounts of one and the same fact. These accounts may either be variants of the same tradition, or may represent almost or entirely different views of what actually occurred. There seem to be eleven pairs of these 'doublets,' as they have been called. Here is a list of them with comments (in which *a* denotes the former narrative, *b* the latter).

(1) 1 Sam. x. 10-12 = xix. 18-xx. 1*a*. The origin of the proverb, 'Is Saul also among the prophets'?

(2) 1 Sam. xvi. 15-22 = xvii. 1-xviii. 4 (part). How David was introduced to Saul.

(3) 1 Sam. xvii. 1-xviii. 4 (part) = 2 Sam. xxi. 19. The slaying of Goliath of Gath.

(4) 1 Sam. xviii. 10, 11 = xix. 9, 10. How Saul cast a spear at David.

(5) 1 Sam. xix. 1-7 = xx. 1*b*-xxi. 1. How Jonathan tried to save David.

(6) 1 Sam. xx. 11-23, 42 = xxiii. 16-18. The religious covenant of brotherhood between David and Jonathan.

(7) 1 Sam. xxi. 10-15 [1*Heb.*, 11-16] = xxvii., xxviii. 1, 2, xxix. David's residence at Gath.

(8) 1 Sam. xxiv. = xxvi. How David in his wanderings spared Saul's life.

(9) 1 Sam. xxxi. = 2 Sam. i. 1-16. The death of Saul.

(10) 1 Sam. ix. 1-x. 16, 27*b* (following the Sept. ; see R.V. marg.), xi. 1-11, 15 = viii., x. 17-27*a*, xii. How Saul became king.

(11) 1 Sam. x. 8, xiii. 7*b*-15*a* -- xv. The rejection of Saul.

(1) S, to which *a* belongs, represents Samuel as the seer and priest of Ramah; for the prophets mentioned in x. 5, 10 have no connexion with Samuel. R, who has inserted *b* into the composite Book of Samuel, thinks of Samuel as 'a prophet' and as the head of a 'school of prophets.' The statement in xix. 24 that Saul and Samuel met on this occasion differs from that in xv. 35 (S). The story of David's wanderings gains greatly by the omission of *b* (and also no doubt by the omission of chap. xx., and xxi. 11-16). According to SS, upon whom we must here rely, David fled from Gibeah of Benjamin, not northward to Ramah, but first to Nob and then to Adullam.

(2) Many attempts have been made from a non-critical point of view to explain the inconsistency. Thus Chandler, the opponent of Pierre Bayle, in his *Life of David* (i. 73), remarks, 'Saul did not inquire who David was, but whose son, because it was of importance to him to know of what family he was, as he had promised to give him his own daughter to wife, if he should conquer the Philistines.' Chandler

here supposes that Saul knew David's name and person, but not his parentage. But Saul knew both, according to xvi. 21, 22. Comp. however Stanley, art. 'David,' *Bible Dict.*, i. 403, and, for critical solutions, Driver, *Introd.*, pp. 169, 170; and see below, p. 78.

(3) It is difficult to suppose with Kirkpatrick (in 1881) that tradition knew of two giants called Goliath. Obviously there are two distinct accounts, and that in 2 Sam. must be the more ancient one (see p. 81). If it be asked, how the slaying of Goliath came to be transferred from Elhanan to David, there is a simple answer. It is well known that the unconscious legend-making faculty is wont to rob less favoured heroes of their great deeds for the benefit of popular favourites. But in this particular case the transference may have been facilitated by the circumstance that Elhanan was 'the son of Dôdo of Bethlehem' (2 Sam. xxiii. 24, 1 Chron. xi. 26). Now Dôdo was probably a more archaic form of David; Dûdu appears from the Tell el-Amama Tablets to have been in use in Palestine in the 15th century B.C. (*Records of the Past*, N.S., iii. 69). It is no decisive objection to this that in 2 Sam. xxi. 19 (cf. 1 Chron. xx. 5) the Elhanan who slew Goliath is called the son of Jair (*not* Jaare-oregim; see Driver *ad loc.*); for one of these two names

was probably the name of a more distant ancestor. Note also that David and his men really fought with the Philistines at Ephes-dammim (see p. 81, note 1).

(4) If with Kuenen and Wellhausen we adopt the Greek text of xviii. 6-30 (which is much shorter than the Hebrew, and lacks vv. 10, 11), this is not a genuine case of 'doublets.' Budde however (p. 219) has well defended the opposite view. Certainly the analysis accounts for the coexistence of the two narratives.

(5) *a* and *b* are variants of the same tradition; *b* however interrupts and so far spoils the narrative (SS), which, after describing Michal's ingenuity, says, 'But David had fled and escaped' (xix. 18*a*), and should then continue, 'And David came to Nob' (xxi. 2).

(6) The covenant between the two friends was variously related (cf. p. 48, note 2). Not liking to lose *b*, R made a place for it by means of the connecting verses 14 and 15.

(7) xxi. 10-15 is a much less detailed description than xxvii. &c., and the occasion which it gives for David's flight to Gath has less convincingness than that given in the latter. The writer probably wished to supplant the other narrative in the interests of David's patriotism. His story is however not a pure invention. The feigned madness of David (like that of Odysseus) is one of those legendary features in

which the people—the great legend-maker—delights, and the humorous tinge of the story cannot be mistaken. The later narrative (i.e. xxi. 11–16) was preferred by the author or authors of the headings of Psa. xxxiv. and lvi.

(8) Bayle's argument (*Dict.*, iv. 542) to show that *a* and *b* relate to the same occurrence may still be read. The doubting philosopher deserves credit for his insight; see also Driver (p. 171) and especially Budde (p. 227), Kuenen (p. 371). Budde seems right in holding that *b* is more recent (i.e. belongs to a more recent document) than *a*, which is not inconsistent with the fact that many points in this version of the tradition are more original than those of its fellow. Budde has also shown that xxv. 2–44 should properly come after xxiii. 28. It received its present position to separate the 'doublets' in *a* and *b*. Saul has been called off from his pursuit of David by an incursion of the Philistines; David however remains in the wilderness of Maon. It is there (viz. at Carmel, now Kurmul) that the scene of the story of Nabal lies, and the reader will at once see how naturally this finely told story is followed by the narrative in *a*. On chaps. xxv. and xxvi., see further pp. 60–62.

(9) Of these two inconsistent reports, the former is evidently the more credible (cf. Wellhausen, *Die Composition* &c., p. 254; Stade, *Gesch.*, p. 258). *b*

(with its discrepant account of Saul's death) was substituted by the editor for a short passage of Da, relating how David received the bearer of the evil tidings (see 2 Sam. iv. 10, Da). So Budde.

(10), (11) One can see here that the peculiarities of the later narrative correspond to a new religious theory respecting the times of Saul. The 'spirit of the times' must from the first have had an effect on the form of tradition. We cannot therefore be surprised if some earnest men, desirous to edify their own age, in perfect good faith allowed a still larger scope to this potent influence. They were the predecessors of the author of Chronicles and of the later Midrash ¹-writers. A failure to observe this altogether vitiates M. Renan's account of early prophetism (*Histoire*, i. 381, 382), in which 1 Sam. ix. 1-x. 16 and xii. are utilized together, as if they stood on precisely the same level. For the right view, see Driver, pp. 165-6, and Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, p. 260 &c. (chap. vii.).

The reader will, I hope, understand the necessity for this preliminary chapter, which supplements the brief consideration of the authorities for the life of David in chap. ii. (see p. 22, beginning 'In opposition to this destructive criticism'). It would obviously

¹ On 'Midrash,' see Driver, p. 497; Graetz, *History of the Jews*, ii. 332.

be an anachronism to construct a life of David out of unsifted material. *Analytic criticism must precede every historical sketch whether of Old or of New Testament times.* What follows from the neglect of this canon may be seen from an essay by the headmaster of Mill Hill School on 'Carnage in the Old Testament.'¹ After a quiet hour of prayer and thanksgiving which 'almost ache with humility and pathetic acknowledgment of mercy,' another episode (he remarks) is related with a strange and seemingly unfeeling brevity. David smites the Moabites, and having their army in his power, he slays after the battle in cold blood two out of three of them with details impossible to repeat. Reading the Book of Samuel in school, Mr. Vince felt that he must face this antithesis as he best could. He tells us how he sought to explain it; but his explanation is too violent to be satisfactory. The real answer is that supplied by the above analysis, viz. that chaps. vii. and viii. come from different sources, and that the former is not history, but an imaginative glorification of history (see below, p. 26). In respect of literary insight one must agree with the sceptical critic Bayle² rather than his orthodox opponents Crousaz and Chandler. Poor Bayle had not indeed the courage of his opinions;

¹ See abstract in *Expository Times*, Dec. 1891, p. 99.

² *Historical Dictionary* (Lond. 1736), iv. 533.

indeed, as he says himself, his talent was only that of doubting. Therefore he failed where we may trust in God to succeed. For true criticism must be constructive.

Among the chief aids to the student are Prof. R. Smith's article 'David' in the *Encycl. Brit.*, and Dillmann's in Schenkel's *Bibel-Lexicon*. Kamphausen's article, *Philister und Hebräer zur Zeit Davids* in Stade's *Zeitschrift*, 1886, pp. 43-97 rectifies some serious misapprehensions. On the critical analysis, comp. Kautzsch (as above) with Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs* &c. (1889), p. 250 &c.; Kuenen, *Onderzoek* &c., ed. 2, I. (1887), p. 386 &c.; Cornill, 'Zur Quellenkritik' &c. in *Königsberger Studien*, I. (1887), pp. 25-59; and his *Einleitung* (1891), p. 111 &c.; Budde, *Die Bücher Richter und Samuel* &c. (1890), p. 210; Kittel, 'Die pentateuch. Urkunden,' &c., in *Theol. Studien und Kritiken*, 1892, pp. 44-71. Some of the most essential critical points are well brought out in Dr. Driver's *Introduction* (1891), pp. 162-174, where the author was greatly hampered by limited space (see my art. in *Expositor*, Feb. 1892, pp. 110-112). See also his *Notes on the Hebrew Text of Samuel* (1890). Duncker's *History* (vol. ii.) is able, but his narrative needs adjustment to the analysis.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHARACTER OF DAVID.

ACTS xiii. 22, 23.—And when he had removed him [Saul], he raised up David to be their king ; to whom also he bare witness, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my heart, who shall do all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to promise brought unto Israel a saviour, Jesus.

THE biographic narratives are for many of us the most interesting part of the Old Testament ; an attack upon any of their heroes excites our liveliest indignation. And yet as soon as we attempt to repel such attacks, whether with the pen, or, as in our large towns we must, with the living voice, we find it a much tougher piece of work than we had supposed ; and even among our Church-students some of the best profess themselves dissatisfied with the conventional solutions of difficulties. In dealing with these circumstances it is not enough to adhere to traditional plans ; we must move with the times.

We shall be 'verily guilty concerning our brother,' if we allow him to drift among the icebergs of doubt for want of an intelligent knowledge of the Bible. Indeed the whole Christian family will be injured, if we do not discover some better way of preserving true reverence for the Old Testament, and more especially for its narratives. But is there any way left which might be tried in popular teaching? Yes; there is one which has until lately been neglected; it is to throw upon the Old Testament the full light of critical research. God has put it into the heart of an increasing number of Christian scholars to apply improved methods to the study of the Scriptures, and they wish now to turn their results to account in the practical service of the Church. It is but too certain that our popular religion needs simplifying, and that the defence of Christian truth against infidelity needs strengthening, and these objects can, it would seem, be promoted by a league between inquiring Christian people on the one hand and the scholars of whom I spoke on the other. In our great centres of population, where attacks upon the Bible are most frequent and most dangerous, such a league seems specially required. Its object will be to apply modern methods of study to the Old Testament with just sufficient precision to bring out the gradualness of divine revelation, to emphasize and

illustrate the essential facts and truths of the Scriptures, and to solve the difficulties and correct the misapprehensions of infidel objectors.

But some timid Christian may ask, Had I not better leave this study to those who have to meet infidel objectors in controversy? May I not, by being too venturesome, expose my own faith to too severe a shock? Historical truth may be good, but spiritual truth is better; why should I not be content with the one thing needful? To which I would reply, with heart-felt sympathy, that vital faith in spiritual truth cannot be imperilled by historical inquiry into its records, that on the contrary there are few better aids to faith than a historical view of the progress of revelation, such as the higher study of the Bible presents to us. Of this we may truly say that it is in some sense 'the beginning of wisdom'; acquire this lore, and you will more safely speculate concerning the mysteries of nature and of human life. And thus on all accounts I would invite educated laymen to join this new league, and study the elements of this fascinating subject. It is a post of honour to which our new England invites them—one in which they may repel with more effect the attacks of irreligion, and at the same time lay the foundation of a better and a purer religious knowledge for the coming age.

The teachers no doubt are comparatively few, and have but scanty means of communicating with their disciples. Among these, books and periodicals stand in the first place ; lectures only in the second. May we also mention sermons ? We not only may, but must. In our changing circumstances we urgently require a greater variety of preaching. And more especially in our cathedrals, where all classes may expect to find a spiritual home, must this requirement be satisfied. To us therefore who minister in these sacred fanes the Apostle of the Gentiles repeats to-day his stirring exhortation, 'Covet earnestly the best gifts.' And among these gifts surely the ability to do justice to the Old Testament, and to instil into educated people a more intelligent reverence for it, is to be included. For what I speak of now is not mere lectures, but sermons, that is addresses which lead up to a personal application of spiritual truth. Let all things in the church be done, as St. Paul says, 'unto edifying,' i.e. with a view to building up the spiritual life. The devout and churchly spirit of such a preacher as I am imagining will be strong enough to give a distinctive tone to his instruction. His discourses, taken one with another, will be so bathed in the love of Christ and the Church ; his historical statements will be so softened by the close neighbourhood of spiritual truth, that every candid hearer,

however simple, may leave the church with a sense that this is the work of God. By such a mode of action, which implies a constant looking upward for help, Christian truth has every needed safeguard, and the historical study of the Bible will be deprived of the terribleness with which a distant view may have invested it. It is in fact one among many modern fulfilments of that New Testament saying, *According as each hath received a gift, even so minister the same among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*¹

I return now to our text. It brings together in a most effective way the Messiah and the Messiah's greatest ancestor, and it suggests a painful reflexion. Whereas the rich humanity of the former is revealing itself more and more to our delighted gaze, the attractive features of the latter are still half blotted out by a traditional theory of no critical value. Let me quote a few passages from the splendid exposition of this theory given by Thomas Carlyle's early friend, the great preacher Edward Irving. David, according to him, had an unique experience and an uniquely comprehensive nature. 'The hearts of a hundred men strove and struggled together within the continent of his single heart.' He 'had that brilliant galaxy of natural gifts, that rich and varied educa-

¹ 1 Pet. iv. 10.

tion, in order to fit him for executing the high office to which he was called by the Spirit, of giving to the Church universal forms of spiritual feeling. And though we neither excuse his acts of wickedness, nor impute them to the temptation of God . . . we will also add that by his loss the Church hath gained ; and that if he had not passed through every valley of humiliation, and stumbled upon the dark mountains, we should not have had a language for the souls of the penitent, or an expression for the dark troubles which compass the soul that feareth to be deserted by its God.' ¹ Now every one of us, I hope, has an affectionate admiration for Edward Irving, and a sincere reluctance to blame him. Nor need we censure him in this particular, for he lived before the new conception of history had established itself in England. But is it natural for those who both know and love history, and consider Bible history, not less than English and even more than Roman and Grecian, a part of the birthright of every thinking person, to go on representing David as a kind of supernatural being, who neither morally nor intellectually was governed by the same laws as ourselves, or at any rate as a medley of irreconcilable elements? And even if it be natural, is it also safe? If we could answer, Yes, we might perhaps excuse this

¹ *Miscellanies from Irving* (1865), p. 455.

indolent folding of our hands to sleep. But no, it is very far from safe. For those who have no restraining scruples, and would crush the delicate wings of an illusion with a sledge-hammer, are already in the field. A vulgar criticism for the vulgar, and a refined one for the refined, are being directed against the reputation of the son of Jesse. They agree in denying that the old reverence for David has any foundation, and require that this outwork of Bible religion should be, not reconstructed on an improved plan, but altogether demolished.

In opposition to this destructive criticism it will be the object of the popular league to which I referred so to criticize as to edify or build up the Church. *Prove all things, hold fast that which is good*, says St. Paul.¹ And what does the command, 'Prove all things' mean when addressed to us? It means in this connexion, Examine and compare the different Biblical records of the life of David. It means further, Do not assume that they all say the same thing, nor that you are bound to find out some way of making them do so, nor that you may disregard any detail in the earliest records which militates against the highest view of David's character. These assumptions were actually made by a writer who flourished about 700 years after David,—the author of the Books

¹ 1 Thess. v. 21.

of Chronicles.¹ Though fully inspired as a religious teacher of his own time, and a worthy representative of the Jewish Church, it is only in some outlying parts of his work that he can safely be followed in statements of facts unsupported by the earlier books.² We shall see presently how, to harmonize the two ancient traditions of the slaughter of Goliath, he invents a brother of Goliath with an impossible name (p. 81). We shall also find that, in his zeal for the 'man after God's heart,' he omits David's great sin and much besides, and transforms him into the image of a saint of his own time. In the third century B.C. this was possible; it is not so at the end of the nineteenth after Christ. We probably feel that one who is so highly honoured in the New Testament as David cannot have been (as some represent) a bandit who for selfish ends seized the crown,³ but there are many of his actions which we must admit to be quite inconsistent with the saintly character. The Chronicler's general view of the life of David is too improbable and too discordant with that of the early records to influence us. And still less may we follow

¹ Bleek places the Chronicles 'at the end of the Persian or the beginning of the Greek period.' With Kuenen and Cornill we shall do well to adopt a slightly later date (c. 250 B.C.).

² See e.g. 1 Chron. ii., iv. (with Wellhausen's early dissertation, 1870, and his *Prolegomena*, 1883, pp. 225-228), and xi. 10-47 (important for the textual criticism of 2 Sam. xxiii. 8-39).

³ Renan, *Hist. of Israel*, i. 331.

those psalm-headings, which represent David as a writer of highly spiritual songs. These headings form no part of the true Bible, and are but like marginal notes of an editor, the correctness of which needs to be carefully tested. The only question is, not how many but how few of the psalms were written by David ; whether in fact more than single phrases, or lines, or verses, or at most sections, can be his work, and whether we have the means of extracting such with any confidence from their context. Disappointing this is no doubt ; one longs to know something of David's inner life, and thinks (mistakenly perhaps) that he would have disclosed this in his religious songs. But it is compensated (as our subsequent psalm-studies will show) by unlooked-for gains both to Jewish history and to the defence of Bible religion. And the same principles which induce us to transfer the so-called psalms of David to later inspired men, compel us to analyze what we used to regard as a single biography of David into several distinct records. The result of this analysis will be of great use to us later on in studying the story of Goliath, and I shall now build upon them to some slight extent in tracing the outlines of the character of David.

That these records are largely based upon popular traditions, which are generally in a high degree trustworthy, but are now and then half unconsciously

idealized into prose-poetry, we have already seen. That they are none the less in the truest and worthiest sense inspired, has also been shown, but it may be well to repeat the statement. No one need apologize for holding that each part of the volume of Scripture is as full of spiritual truth and as capable of conveying a word of God as the nature of its contents admits.¹ The Old Testament narratives, for instance, are as truly inspired as the Psalms, and the Psalms as the Epistles of St. Paul. But we dare not affirm that all these groups of writings are equally inspired. They are the work of writers, each of whom had his own personal limitations. If even St. Paul had only 'the firstfruits of the Spirit,' much more must this be true of those who adapted the traditions of David's life to later times. If the Lord Jesus Himself 'increased in wisdom and stature,' we must not be surprised at the discovery that those who were 'borne along,' as a New Testament writer says, 'by the Holy Spirit,' show the greatest differences in the clearness of their spiritual intuitions.

Passing to the precious records stored up in the Books of Samuel, we must remark at the outset that there are three distinct subjects upon which they give us information, viz. 1. the external facts of the period described; 2. the religious belief of the inspired

¹ How much belongs to this volume is however a historical question.

writers of the records, who neither are, nor claim to be, mere matter-of-fact reporters ; and 3. the character and religious position of the great men of the period, especially Saul and David. The third of these subjects is the most generally interesting to Christian students, but I can only now deal with that portion of it which relates to David. It is the historical not the idealized David of whom we are in search, and we must therefore put aside at least two of the most beautiful and most inspired passages in the Books of Samuel, viz. 1 Sam. xvii. and 2 Sam. vii. The former contains the more poetical and therefore less historical of the two rival accounts of the victory over Goliath ;¹ the latter, a prophecy ascribed to Nathan, together with a very beautiful prayer ascribed to David, both of which, as internal evidence shows, were written in the last century of the Jewish state.² These truly edifying passages illustrate rather the religious belief of the inspired narrators than that of their hero. They also show the considerateness with which the

¹ See chaps. iv.-v.

² Both these passages were conceived dramatically ; they represent what Nathan and David might, according to the writer, be supposed to have said (see my *Jeremiah*, 1888, p. 88 ; *B.L.*, p. 128, note *n*). The Davidic dynasty had lasted some time when 2 Sam. vii. was written both good and evil kings had sprung from it. The phraseology of Deuteronomy is often traceable (see especially *vv.* 1, 11, 13, 22, 23, 24). Cf. Colenso, *Pentateuch*, part vii., app. § 128. Ps. lxxxix., which is parallel to this composition was written *at earliest* in 'the closing years of the monarchy' (Driver, *Introd.*, p. 358 ; cf. *B.L.*, pp. 117-8).

life of David was adapted to the use of devout readers of another generation, who, though not so great as David, came nearer to pure spiritual religion than was possible for him to do. Is our favourite hero disparaged by this remark? Certainly not. David, as we are told in the same speech of St. Paul from which the text is taken, 'served his own generation by the will of God';¹ and how few there are even in the roll of great men who can do more than this! Then, as the speaker adds, David 'fell on sleep,' and left the fulfilment of God's purposes to others. Among his successors were the gifted writers of 1 Sam. xvii. and 2 Sam. vii., who served the cause of progress not more truly, though with more religious insight, than did the hero whom they idealize.

In our own day there is a growing reaction against the tendency to idealize David. Not only those who have almost lost the instinct of reverence, but even Church-students have begun to be stirred by the modern historical spirit. Thus Frederick Denison Maurice cautions us 'not to try to make out a case for David or the Bible by distorting a single fact even by giving it a different colour from that which it would have if we found it elsewhere,'² and since this saintly man's decease several Christian writers have done their best to apply a moral criticism to the

¹ Acts xiii. 36.

² *Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament.*

life of David. Historical criticism however has not yet had its full rights. An unseen leader seems to beckon us forward, but we follow him with faltering steps. Nor will the Church of the future altogether blame us. The Church of a great though faulty past bade us reverence David like St. Paul and St. John, and though we see that this was an injury to truth, we love to rescue something from our illusion. We cannot bear to form a harsh judgment respecting David, nor to 'sit in the seat of the scornful.'

This question therefore naturally rises to our lips, Is there any way of reconciling the two points of view—that of historical inquiry and that of reverent affection for a spiritual ancestor? It may perhaps be replied that there are virtually two Davids,—one the historical David who both sang songs and reigned over the people of Israel, the other that unworldly poet who speaks in the name of the Church-nation in many of the psalms, and who is poetically a direct descendant of David, and that our reverent affection is claimed only by the latter. But is this reply quite sufficient? No; it contains indeed important elements of truth, but it does not give us the full solution of our difficulty. We admit that there are virtually two Davids: more easily could Karl the Great have written St. Bernard's hymn than the David of the Books of Samuel the 51st psalm! We break away

from our fathers on this point absolutely and entirely ; but we would fain keep some genuine reverence even for the historical David. Or to express ourselves in a more defensible way, we fear to lose any grains of truth in a time-honoured tradition.

What shall we say, then? Is there any other possible solution of our difficulty? There is ; and to obtain it we must distinguish two classes of elements in David's character — those which he received from the past, and those by which he prophesies of a better age. Let us first of all seek to ascertain the former, testing the life of David by the standard of the preceding age, as this is presented in the Book of Judges and the first book of Samuel. For with one of the best living German scholars, I do not believe ' that the condition of things under Saul and David was really so different from that under Gideon as many modern writers suppose.' ¹

It will be clear from these early records that the race to which David belonged was none of the gentlest. How passing strange is the condition of public morals (if the word can be used) there revealed to us ! The cruelties of primitive war one can understand ; but who is not shocked at the inhumanities of peace? Acts of violence and oppression were common, in spite of the beneficent but restricted

¹ Hermann Schultz, *Alttest. Theologie*, ed. 4, p. 140.

activity of the Judges, nor have we any reason to suppose that a vital reform was introduced by the brave but capricious king Saul. That lofty precept, so noble in itself, though, taken literally, so far behind the law of Christ, 'Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,'¹ was not yet known, and it was much if a private man's vengeance was sometimes limited by the principle, '(Only) an eye for an eye, and (only) a tooth for a tooth.'² Nor was there supposed to be anything amiss in deceiving another for one's own interest. Such was the low standard of morality in the century preceding David.

Nor can it be said that the religious conceptions of the ancestors of David were distinguished for their purity. The later editors of the literary heirlooms of the Jewish Church have not attempted to remove the evidence of the slow progress of their people. Looking over the early records we see, perhaps with some surprise, that it was not so much morality as formal

¹ Lev. xix. 18. This belongs to the Holiness-Law (Lev. xvii.-xxvi., on which see Driver, *Intr.*, pp. 43-54), which, though it contains many early elements, cannot be appealed to for the Davidic age. A number of the precepts in Lev. xix. may be taken as a commentary on the two original tables of the Decalogue, and the fact that such a comparatively spiritual commentary was needed in the post-Davidic age is itself significant to those who believe in historical development.

² Ex. xxi. 24.

sacrifice and the presence of the ark of the national God with the host of Israel which was believed to ensure the divine protection.¹ You may think that an inspired man like Samuel must have led the people to a nobler type of religion than this, and that if we had fuller sources of information we should be able to prove this. For my own part, I fully share your willingness to think highly of Samuel. That some of the Israelites in the time of the Judges had, by the grace of God, risen somewhat above the low standard of the masses, is a fair inference from the Song of Deborah. It is also reasonable to believe that Samuel was as much above the multitude in his day as Deborah had been in hers. More than this we cannot say. But if we turn to the oldest traditions respecting Samuel, we shall find that his conscious aim was not the purification of religion, but the deliverance of Israel from its enemies.² He evidently retained the old conception of Jehovah as a stern war-god who demanded the lives of his enemies (comp. Judg. v. 26-31), so that when one of the greatest of them all had been selfishly spared by Saul (as if to grace his triumph), Samuel, we are told, 'hewed Agag in pieces before Jehovah' at the twelve sacred pillars of

¹ Judg. xx. 26-28, 1 Sam. vii. 9, xiii. 10; 1 Sam. iv. 3, 2 Sam. xv. 24, cf. Jer. iii. 16 (Targum).

² See Wellhausen, *Hist. of Israel and Judah* (1891), p. 41.

‘Gilgal.’¹ Samuel himself was the priest and ‘seer’ of Ramah. Though not called a ‘prophet’ (*nābī*),² he was evidently no common ‘seer,’ as he proved by the discovery of the one man by whom Jehovah could deliver Israel. As to the extent of the divinity which he ascribed to Jehovah, and as to his view of sacrifice, we have no conclusive evidence. It would be pleasant to believe that he anticipated the later prophets, but neither from 1 Sam. xii. 21 nor from 1 Sam. xv. 22 can we prove this.³ And how slender his religious influence must have been, we can judge from 1 Sam. ix., where the servant of Saul proposes to fee the ‘man of God’ that he may tell Saul where to find his lost asses? How could Samuel be a great religious teacher when such was the popular estimate of his functions?

Let us now turn to the traditional records of David’s life. Many acts are there ascribed to this admired king which are equally unworthy of a true

¹ 1 Sam. xv. 33.

² See 1 Sam. ix. 9, 11. In a passage referred by the analysis to a later period Samuel is represented as the head of a guild or company of prophets (1 Sam. xix. 20; cf. W. R. Smith, *The Prophets of Israel*, pp. 86, 391).

³ Both these passages belong to documents of the later prophetic period. Unless we can believe that David’s reputed seer Asaph wrote Ps. l., the latter passage is not earlier than Hosea (cf. Hos. vi. 6), and unless Deuteronomy was written by Moses, or (as Kleinert thought in 1872) by Samuel, the former is not earlier than the reign of Josiah. These inferences agree with the latest critical analysis of Samuel.

knight and shocking to the unsophisticated Christian sentiment. How cruel, for instance, David could be in his warfare! I will not lay too much stress on his dealings with tribes of Bedouin robbers,¹ but what are we to say of his conduct to the very people which, in his outlaw days, had so hospitably received his aged parents — the Moabites?² To the Ammonites, I admit, he was more humane, if the margin of the R.V. of 2 Sam. xii. 31 is to be followed;³ but he was at any rate liable to a fierce craving for revenge which overpowered his better judgment. This comes out very clearly in the romantic story of Nabal,⁴ in which Abigail shews to better advantage than David, though her beautiful speech against the causeless shedding of blood may be less her own than the narrator's; and

¹ 1 Sam. xxvii. 8-12. From a worldly point of view, the policy of 'Thorough' seems excusable here. Cf. Palmer, *The Desert of the Exodus*, p. 299.

² 2 Sam. viii. 2; cf. 1 Sam. xxii. 3, 4. The vengeance was possibly an act of national retaliation in which David could not avoid participating. It would seem that other kings committed almost equal cruelties (see 2 Chron. xxv. 12, and cf. Doughty, *A.D.*, i. 44). On an earlier attempt of Jewish rabbis to excuse David, see Chandler, *Life of David*, ii. 163.

³ R.V. marg. has, 'And he brought forth the people . . . and put them to saws . . . and made them labour at the brickmould,' i.e. put them to forced labour at public works. This view of the passage is due to Prof. Hoffmann of Kiel; it has received the adhesion of Stade (*Gesch.* 278), Kautzsch (translation of O. T.), and very nearly of Prof. Driver (*Samuel*, 228). The very same cruelty however, which is imputed by the received text to David was perpetrated by the Syrians of Damascus (Am. i. 3, cf. 2 Kings xiii. 7).

⁴ 1 Sam. xxv.

it is equally proved by the melancholy record of David's dealings with Mephibosheth, the son of his old friend Jonathan.¹ For the vindictive words, however, reported in 1 Kings ii. 5-9, the narrator, as I hope to show, is alone responsible. Observe next David's (to us) surprising predilection for crooked policy, in which he contrasts not only with the psalmists but with that upright Greek poet Pindar. It has been said that his hateful letter to Joab concerning Uriah was an unnatural device suggested by his crime with Bathsheba ; under such circumstances, we are told, a noble nature may be seduced to acts of which it would otherwise be incapable. But no ; stratagem was as natural to David as to Jacob. He was not one of those Israelites indeed 'in whom there is no guile,' but by the testimony of Saul could 'deal very subtilly'.² Some of his crafty acts, no doubt

¹ 2 Sam. xvi. 1-4. Mephibosheth's real name was Meribbaal.

² See 1 Sam. xxiii. 22, and cf. 1 Sam. xxi. 1-9, 13, xxvii. 10, 11, xxviii. 2, xxix. 8 ; 2 Sam. xi. 6-25, xv. 32-36. Besides the letter to Joab and the use which David made of Hushai the Archite, we must seriously condemn David's thoughtless fraud upon Ahimelech the priest, which led to the murder of Ahimelech and his fellow-priests, and the utter destruction of all living beings in Nob (1 Sam. xxii. 17-19), even though we gladly admit that David was sorry for it afterwards (1 Sam. xxii. 20-23). Happily he is not, as the later tradition made out, the author of Ps. lii. But what shall we say of his extreme shiftiness? May it be accounted for by David's difficult circumstances? Hardly ; a man of simple, straightforward character does not, even in straits, go to such lengths as David. Surely the truth is that shiftiness was inherent in the old Israelitish character. The pious and enlightened men who adapted the old traditions of David's life were themselves not free from

seem to us worse than others, as for instance the use he makes of his friend Hushai against Ahithophel. Others we can excuse, though David appeals to us far less than Achish, the open-hearted Philistine king. And again, we may sometimes even find David's subtlety in some degree praiseworthy, as when, in order to close the civil war the sooner, he accepts the

it ; they evidently sympathize to some extent with their hero. So fully conscious are some other writers of this national characteristic that (following popular traditions) they make even the patriarch Jacob as shifty as David, and are far from disapproving his cleverness. I hasten to add that just as even the oldest narrator of the David-traditions condemns the hateful expedient of the letter to Joab about Uriah, so the Yahvist in Genesis condemns (as could easily be shown) the shameful fraud practised by Jacob at his mother's bidding upon his old father. They condemn the special immorality of the circumstances, however, not the mere craft in itself. Shiftiness was in reality an inheritance from the nomadic period of the *bené Israel*. 'The necessitous livelihood of the wilderness must cast him [the nomad] into many perplexities, out of which [he] will unwind himself by any shift,' Doughty, *A.D.* i. 368. The later prophets however denounced shiftiness in no measured terms (see the commentators on Jer. ix. 4), and the psalmists followed them (Ps. v. 6, 9 &c.). I will quote here two helpful sentences of Mozley (*Ruling Ideas*, &c., pp. 172-3), which throw light on primitive psychology. 'The enemy was one who was out of the pale of charity, and with whom injurious relations were natural. But if injurious relations were natural, untruthful relations were natural also.' Nor need we be surprised at the union of great cunning with as great boldness in David. 'The daring temper is quite consistent with the deceitful. They must do what is effectual, and underground work is effectual.' But with this principle, of action contrast (as it is fair to do) the holy Pindar's renouncement of the policy of cunning. The *ἄδικος λόγος*, he says, bids us love our friends, but circumvent an enemy on crooked paths like a wolf. Nay, nay, replies the *δίκαιος λόγος* ; 'a straight course is best, and there is no contending against God. Success does not come from cunning or overreaching. Bear God's yoke' (*Pyth.* ii. 86-96, Gildersleeve). Have I gone too far in calling Pindar 'inspired' (chap. on Inspiration)?

treacherous offer of Abner to abandon his king Ishbaal or Ishbosheth. Lastly, we come to the record of David's fall, with all its ramifications of sin, which may equally well be called a transgression against David's God and against his neighbour. Even those who are averse to a strait-laced Christianity have never been slow to condemn this shameful deed as at once a blunder and a crime.¹

I have yet to speak of David's religious ideas. These were in some respects of not too refined a nature. To him, as well as to the Philistines (1 Sam. iv. 7), and apparently to Moses himself (Num. x. 35) the wonder-working power (the *numen*) of 'the God of the armies of Israel' resided in the ark.² This was therefore so holy an object that even taking hold of it with a good intention could be punished by a man's sudden death.³ We must not indeed imagine that the ark itself is David's God; there is a fine

¹ 2 Sam. xi. The historicity of the narrative has been denied by M. Renan and Mr. Heilprin. But this and the next chapter form part of one of our very best historical records. The Chronicler indeed omits the Uriah-story, but for a good reason. Above, I have called David's act a *blunder*. For this reason. David's numerous wives and concubines (2 Sam. xv. 16, xix. 6) in general represented useful family alliances. But Ahithophel, Bathsheba's grandfather (see J. J. Blunt) became the leading counsellor in the dangerous conspiracy of Absalom.

² On the significance of the ark, cf. *B.L.*, pp. 315, 328, 329.

³ 2 Sam. vi. 6, 7; cf. 1 Chron. xiii. 10, where 'he died before the ark of God' becomes 'he died before God.'

passage in which he refuses to take the field with the ark. He feels that his God is angry with him, and he will not risk the safety of so holy a thing. Jehovah may, after all, be pleased to deliver him, and this He can do, though the ark and the army of David be parted.¹ Thus there were some high moments in David's life when he distinguished Jehovah from any of the objects which represented Him or any of the media through which He worked. But we do not find that he ever succeeded in overcoming the narrow idea of Jehovah's divinity in which he had been brought up. 'They have driven me out this day,' he complains to Saul, 'that I should have no share in Jehovah's inheritance, saying, Go, serve other gods.'² Of the psalmists' conception of spiritual prayer he was ignorant; at any rate, he was not averse to seek revelations from Jehovah by means of the priestly ephod.³ And though it is only his wife who can be proved to have possessed a 'teraphim,' yet the fact that these images were still used in divination in the

¹ 2 Sam. xv. 24-26 (I assume the accuracy of the narrative).

² 1 Sam. xxvi. 19 (cf. Hos. ix. 3). Uriah and Ittai, Hittites, both worshipped the God of Israel. The implied principle is that of all primitive Semitic religions, and is also that of the old religion of Hellas (Soph. *Oed. Col.* 180-183, quoted by Bishop Warburton, *Works*, v. 50). 'A man's religion is part of his political connection' (W. R. Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, p. 37); cf. Ruth i. 15, 16.

³ 1 Sam. xxiii. 9, xxx. 7.

times of the later prophets makes it very hazardous to suppose that David was in this particular above his age. If he really did hold purer views, why did he not, as a pattern Israelite is reported to have done, cleanse his house from such heathenish objects?¹ Next, as to David's notions of sacrifice. He is indeed nowhere said, like Samuel, to have slain any one 'before Jehovah' as a sacrificial act,² yet we do find him delivering up seven grandsons of Saul to the Gibeonites to be 'hanged up before (or, unto) Jehovah.'³ It was the time when Rizpah the daughter of Aiah kept solemn tryst with her dead, covering them by day and by night with sackcloth. *We* should probably say that if Saul's fault was expiated by any human deed, it was not by the execution of these unoffending men, but by Rizpah's supreme proof of maternal love. But not so thought the age of David. The dread act of the Gibeonites was not merely a formal compliance with the custom of blood-vengeance, but had the nature of a sacrifice, as the expression 'before Jehovah' itself suggests. And David himself had very crude ideas of sacrifice. These are his

¹ See 1 Sam. xix. 13-16, 2 Kings xxiii. 24, Zech. x. 2, and cf. Gen. xxvi. 19, 34, xxxv. 2-4.

² See 1 Sam. xv. 33, and cf. 2 Sam. vi. 17 (sacrifices 'before Jehovah').

³ 2 Sam. xxi. 6-9.

authentic words to his persecutor Saul, 'If it be Jehovah that hath stirred thee up against me, let him accept (literally, smell) an offering'¹ (i.e. 'If thy bad thoughts of me are due to a temptation from without, appease the divine anger by a sacrifice'). Strange advice we may think it, especially as Jehovah Himself is said to have 'stirred up' or 'enticed' Saul against his son-in-law. But it is illustrated by an act recorded of David himself in the account of the great pestilence. At the very height of this calamity David, we are told, offered sacrifice to Jehovah on the threshing-floor of Araunah, and the plague ceased. Yet, as we are expressly told, it was Jehovah who had 'stirred up' David to commit the 'sin' of numbering the people.²

Such is a truthful sketch of the darker side of David's moral and religious character. May we venture to canonize one who committed those acts and held those ideas? Not from the point of view of the higher Biblical religion. Numberless passages both from the psalms and from the gospels at once occur to us forbidding such misplaced reverence. Against the exaggerations of

¹ 1 Sam. xxvi. 19, R.V.

² 2 Sam. xxiv. 1, 25. In 1 Chron. xxi. 1 the enticement is ascribed to 'Satan.'

Newman the theologian let us quote Newman the poet,—

Double praise thou shalt attain
 In royal court and battle plain ;
 Then comes heart-ache, care, distress,
 Blighted hope, and loneliness ;
 Wounds from friend and gifts from foe,
 Dizzied faith, and guilt, and woe,
 Loftiest aims by earth defiled,
 Gleams of wisdom sin-beguiled,
 Sated power's tyrannic mood,
 Counsels shared with men of blood,
 Sad success, parental tears,
 And a dreary gift of years.¹

But how if we test our hero by the standard of the times in which he was born—the standard which I have already endeavoured to put before you? The result will certainly be, not that we *reverence* him either for his poor religious ideas or for his questionable actions, but that we almost entirely abstain from *blaming* him for them. I say, almost entirely, because there is one action which, following an ancient narrator (1 Kings xv. 5), we must emphatically condemn. Adultery was indeed no new sin ; but, so far as we can judge, it was not common in the best Israelitish families. Certainly Saul was innocent of it, and why should not David have been so too? True, David was more thoroughly a king than Saul, and Oriental sovereignty, by the

¹ *Lyra Apostolica*, no. 57, 'The Call of David.'

immense power which it gives, is in a high degree corrupting to the character. But 'keep thy heart with all diligence,' is a precept for rulers as well as for the ruled, and a proper reverence for Israelitish traditions would have kept David from this combination of terrible sins.

It is too soon to say whether our wish to reverence David can be gratified. We have indeed found that almost everything in him which most shocks the Christian conscience is but a survival of primitive modes of thought and feeling, and we can excuse it as we hope to be excused ourselves for the strange survivals which often appear in corners of our own land. But we have yet to discover whether there are any elements in the character of David which point onwards to a better age and a higher religion. If we can find such (and I certainly hope that we shall) this great king will have some claim on our reverence, and we shall be able to put a fuller meaning into the words, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my heart.' But here I must break off. Of one thing at any rate we may be certain—that Jesus Christ would fain use these words of each of us. He came 'to seek and to save that which was lost,' and His search, thank God! is not yet finished. He would fain transform you and me

into 'men after his heart,' suitable instruments for His beneficent purposes. Let us answer His gracious call ; let us say, ' Lord, Thou hast found me ; henceforth I will live ; not unto myself, but unto Thee, who didst give Thyself for me.'

CHAPTER III.

THE CHARACTER OF DAVID (*continued*).

1 SAM. xiii. 14.—Jehovah hath sought him a man after his heart, and Jehovah hath appointed him to be prince over his people.

AN eminent cathedral preacher of our time uses these striking words, 'We will be loyal . . . to our high Christian pedigree, that knits us up to king, and saint, and martyr of old heroic days ; yes, loyal to it, even though there be woven into its tale scandals as terrible as Tamar's, memories as unhappy as those of *Bathsheba* and *Rahab*.'¹ The preacher is exhorting the congregation not to neglect or disavow their religious connexion with the past on account of the many blots upon the fair fame of the Church. The history of the Church is not in all respects what we could wish, and yet we will not, we must not too severely judge our spiritual ancestors, but will look out for those better,

¹ H. S. Holland, *In Behalf of Belief*, p. 207.

those nobler elements in them which we can sympathize with and reverence. Such too will, I think, be our right attitude towards the history of David. This great king's moral errors must in themselves be repugnant to us, but our blame for all but the worst of them will be neutralized by a comprehension of David's historical position, and even for his terrible fall reflexion enables us to make some charitable allowance. And we shall make it a point of conscience to search diligently for any features of his character which may justify a reverent affection for him on our part.

Certainly David himself inspired a boundless affection in most of those who knew him. 'All Israel and Judah loved' him, we are told (1 Sam. xviii. 16); he was in fact a born charmer. In proof of this let us appeal, not to the fickle Michal, nor to the faithful Jonathan, nor to David's 'three mighty men' who 'jeopardied their lives' for a draught of water for him, but to the enthusiasm of two Philistines—Achish, king of Gath, and Ittai, also of Gath, one of David's 'Swiss Guard.'¹ Listen to the impassioned words of the latter. David, you remember, is starting on his flight from Jerusalem, and bids Ittai return and wor-

¹ Another of David's Hittites was Uriah, who had bound himself by marriage to the people of David, whose empire, it should be noted, touched 'the land of the Hittites' in the north at Kadesh (see 2 Sam. xxiv. 6 in *Variorum Bible*, and Dr. Driver's note, *Samuel*, p. 286).

ship the rising sun, instead of going up and down with homeless fugitives. 'Ittai answered the king and said, As Jehovah liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, even there also will thy servant be.'¹ Now, would this foreign soldier have flamed up in such an ardour of self-sacrifice if his leader had not been worthy of it? Of course Ittai had caught the spark from David's own men, whose intense loyalty never came out more nobly than in Absalom's rebellion. The 'lamp of Israel' they called him;² and I think that the title was suggested not merely by the brilliance of his talents and the strangeness of his good fortune, but by an exquisite moral fragrance of character. To compare David with Bonaparte, is most unfair. It would be a less injury to measure him with Karl the Great;³ but to do him justice we should compare him with Eastern kings, Egyptian, Assyrian and the like, heroes, among whom, so far as we know, David stands supreme.

I do not of course base a claim to reverent affection

¹ 2 Sam. xv. 21.

² 2 Sam. xxi. 17.

³ 'Popularity goes out to meet some men, almost without being sought, takes them by the hand, exacts from them the commission of crimes as part of the programme which it imposes on them. Such a man was Bonaparte; such a man was David,' Renan, *History of Israel*, E. T., i. 334. 'Much of David's life and character becomes more intelligible to us, as we look at it in the analogy . . . of the emperor Charles the Great'. Alexander, *B.L. for* 1876, p. 78. Contrast the latter with his son Lewis, the first royal saint.

for David on his possession of mere household virtues. That he had such indeed, I fully believe. But the evidence before us suggests that they were marred by the practice of polygamy¹ which he adopted from other Oriental kings. Who does not lament this? Who would not gladly find in the life of David a parallel to Jacob's beautiful courtship of Rachel? But this was not to be. In only one of the family relations does he become the typical man; as a mourning father he makes the whole world his kin. The desolating blow fell twice; first, when he lost the child of his shame, and next, when he was so cruelly deprived of his darling Absalom. You know the pathetic narratives, which are as classical in expression as anything in literature.² The gentle melancholy of

¹ A plurality of wives is (1) a proof of a man's riches and high rank, (2) a means of extending one's influence. The prophets and their disciples felt the danger of it. Hence it is all but prohibited in Deut. xvii. 17 (Josiah's reign), and certainly not recommended in Gen. ii. 23.

² 2 Sam. xii. 15-23; xviii. 33 xix. 4. On the narrative of the death of Absalom, see Plumptre, *Biblical Studies*, p. 125. The unfortunate prince was 'caught by the thick forked boughs of a terebinth, and jammed in with the violence of the shock.' The cairn piled over his body was like that of Achan, Josh. vii. 25. Not only the Israelites but the Arabs and (as Caesar says) the ancient Britons had the custom of casting stones on the graves of criminals. A stone symbolizes a curse; Satan in the Korán (iii. 31 &c.) is called 'the pelted,' i.e. the cursed. Poor Absalom! People call him vain because of his long locks, but these were probably the mark of his political pretensions, the hair of Hebrew princes, like that of Maori chiefs, being sacred (see W. R. Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, p. 464); and these political pretensions would never have been put forward, if David had not neglected the duty of determining the succession to the crown (in concert with the 'elders').

the bereaved father, who comforts himself with the thought of reunion, in the first passage, and his uncontrollable agony in the second, both appeal to us in different moods. In his first sorrow David had but to think of his own loss; in his second, he thinks also of his son's. Ah! how many mourners there are who can sympathize with David!—happy, thrice happy, if they have had no experience of David's keenest pang—that of regret for a stained character and a blighted promise!

But the love which we desire, if it may be, to cherish for David is one that is blended with reverence. And for evidence of his claim to this we must look further. There is a rarer quality in his friendship with Jonathan. It is probable no doubt that the editor of our Books of Samuel has given some poetic touches of his own, idealizing the literal facts of history, but that these facts were in themselves lovely and poetical, is clear from the words of a first-class historical document, the elegy upon Saul and Jonathan.

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan :¹

¹ Why does David say 'my brother Jonathan'?—or, as Mr. Ruskin has framed the question (*Fors Clavigera*, 1874, p. 87),—'How is it that David has to make a brother of Saul's son, getting, as it seems, no brotherly kindness, nor, more wonderful yet, sisterly kindness at his own fireside'? The assumption however is unjustified. David's 'brethren' and 'all his father's house' (besides his sisters' sons Joab, Amasa, Abishai) drew to his side (1 Sam. xxii. 1). Even Eliab, who is said to have reproached David in his youth, was perhaps rewarded for his services (1 Chron. xxvii. 18, 'Elihu'). Still it is true

Very pleasant wast thou unto me :

Thy love to me was wonderful,

Passing the love of women.¹

We should not perhaps endorse the last line of this passage, for in the progress of the world we have learned to know the love of women better ; but what David really means is true—that he at least has never known such a strong and unselfish love as Jonathan's. One may hesitate indeed to believe, without better historical evidence,² that Jonathan really foresaw the

that Jonathan was one of those friends who 'stick closer than a brother' (Prov. xviii. 24) and of whom Icelandic proverbs speak so warmly. He was to David what Patroclus was to Achilles, who says, 'If there be forgetfulness in death, yet even then will I remember my friend,' and what Glaucus was to Diomedes, whose exchange of armour reminds us of Jonathan's act in 1 Sam. xviii. 4. In fact David and Jonathan entered into a formal religious covenant of adoptive brotherhood (see 1 Sam. xx., xxiii. 14-18, and 2 Sam. xxi. 7), analogous to that described by Trumbull (*The Blood-covenant*, 1885), and W. R. Smith (*The Religion of Semites*, 1889, pp. 296-300), though without the old rite of the meeting of bloods on the sacred stone.

¹ 2 Sam. i. 26. On the origin of the elegy, cf. *B.L.*, pp. 192, 212. 'It is remarkable,' observes Driver, 'that no *religious* thought of any kind appears in the poem' (*Samuel*, p. 185). This is *in favour* of its genuineness. With all his hypercriticism, Duncker admits that *vi.* 26 'may certainly have come from David' (*History*, ii. 145). But how does it differ in style from the rest of the poem?

² There are two accounts (see p. 8) of the covenant between David and Jonathan ; but it stands to reason that we cannot depend on the accuracy of the speeches. Chap. xx. in particular has been filled out like the story of David and Goliath. And how should Jonathan have anticipated such a strange thing as the elevation of David to the throne? I may be referred to 1 Sam. xvi. 1-13, where David is said to have been anointed by Samuel 'in the midst of his brothers.' But, as Wellhausen and others have conclusively shown, this passage is but an awkward imitation of x. 1-7. The editor, to whom it is due,

good fortune of David, and sweetened his own disappointment by sympathy with his friend. But it remains an idyllic picture—that of Jonathan the king's son and David the outcast bound together by a covenant of adoptive brotherhood. And as creations of the devout fancy we may enjoy the idealization which later Hebrew writers gave it, just as we delight in the still more famous story of David and Goliath.

If we are asked which of the two figures—David or Jonathan—most excites our interest, we shall of course answer, Jonathan. But we must at any rate respect David for his fidelity to his friend and his friend's poor lame son.¹ There are few things in the early narratives more pathetic than this, 'And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him? And

wished to make it clear that the Spirit of Jehovah, which (xvi. 14) had departed from Saul, abode henceforth upon David, the 'neighbour' referred to in xv. 28 as 'better' than Saul. David's brothers however knew nothing of the anointing (see xvii. 28), and David himself on a subsequent occasion speaks quite naturally of Saul as 'Jehovah's Anointed' (xxiv. 6, xxvi. 9). There are also various incongruities in xvi. 1-13 into which none of the ancient narrators would have fallen (see Budde, p. 216).

¹ It is unhappily true that David lapsed from this fidelity to Jonathan (2 Sam. xvi. 1-4; xix. 29). Mephibosheth's real name was Meribbaal (1 Chron. ix. 40). Names compounded with *baal* (an innocent though somewhat dangerous name for Jehovah; see my notes on Hos. ii. 16, ix. 10 in Cambridge Bible) were altered by some later writers, by the substitution of *bosheth* or *beseth* 'shame' for *baal*. Thus Ishbaal became Ishbosheth; Jerubbaal, Jerubbesheth.

Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son which is lame on his feet.' ¹ Such fidelity warms the heart ; and I can well understand how Cardinal Newman, with the instincts of a poet, sought to idealize it. According to him, 'the pale calm spectre of a blameless friend' was ever near David, controlling his hot, passionate nature.² A dream ! a beautiful dream ! The sanctifying power of the memory of friends arises from the Christian faith in immortality. 'He bides with us who dies,' is only true, if death to the righteous is the gate of heaven.

If there is nought but what we see,
The friend I loved is lost to me.³

Now David would not indeed have used exactly these words ; for he believed, however vaguely (as we may think), in a supreme God. But he did not possess the blessed hope of a spiritual immortality. 'I shall go to him,' meant only, 'I shall be reunited with my child in the same part of the joyless world of the dead.'

It is already something to be able to respect David, and to differ from a once admired philosopher who says, 'Such are some human hearts that they can

¹ 2 Sam. ix. 3.

² *Lyra Apostolica*, no. 18, 'David and Jonathan.'

³ E. R. Sill [an American poet], *The Invisible*.

hardly find the least sympathy with that only one which had the character of being after the pattern of the Almighty.’¹ Sympathy of course depends on a just apprehension of facts, and this Shaftesbury (a contemporary of Bayle) was unable to get. I trust however that we have been not unjust to the facts, and that in consequence we sympathize a little with David. But I think too that we are most of us still somewhat dissatisfied. We would fain reverence the son of Jesse as in some true sense ‘a man after God’s heart.’—In some true sense? Yes; for our secularist friends, following Shaftesbury and Bayle, misunderstand the phrase. There is no occasion either like the secularists to deride the Hebrew narrator, or, like the orthodox, to offer the plausible excuse² that a man is to be judged by his ideal rather than by his practice—which is true for Robert Burns but hardly for David. Let us look at the context. The words which follow our text should remove all doubt as to the writer’s meaning. He continues thus, ‘and Jehovah hath commanded him to be captain over his people.’ A ‘man after God’s mind’ (for ‘heart,’ as often elsewhere, means ‘mind’ or ‘purpose’) is one in whom the God of Israel has found the qualities of a

¹ Shaftesbury, *Soliloquy*, part III., sect. 3.

² Carlyle. Mrs. Oliphant offers a weaker explanation. ‘By this superlative phrase the historian translates David’s charm and fascination of nature’ (*Jerusalem*, p. 115).

captain or leader,¹ just as 'shepherds according to my heart' (Jer. iii. 15) signifies 'rulers who shall answer the purpose for which I send them.' It is equivalent to 'Jehovah's Anointed,' which means one who, whether with or without the sacramental oil, has received the anointing of the Spirit, has had his natural faculty of leadership supernaturally heightened. Such a 'natural-supernatural' faculty deserves, as Thomas Carlyle showed, our deepest reverence. Those who have it are the true 'kings of men,' and if not the only heroes, yet equal to the greatest. I ask therefore, May we include David among them? Can we justify the assertion that he was a great and good ruler by well-attested facts?

The first qualities of a truly great ruler which we look for in David are—patriotism and public spirit, respect for national laws and institutions, and punctuality in the administration of justice. And these qualities, so far as our information goes, he appears on the whole to have possessed. Look at him in his earlier period. 'He was forced into—not rebellion, for no act against Saul's authority is ever suggested—but into a wild and feudatory life by incessant pursuit of persecution; yet he raised no hostile banner, put forth no pretensions to the crown. And when in despair and sickness of heart he turned away and

¹ The Targum has here 'a man performing his will'; cf. Acts xiii. 32.

directed his steps to the Philistine court to seek the protection of the enemies of Israel, it was not like Coriolanus to ruin Rome, but only to shelter himself from a ceaseless pursuit.¹ True, it has been asserted that David acted unpatriotically while a vassal of Achish—that he raided upon the land of Judah and would willingly have fought against Saul at Gilboa, if Achish had not sent him away.² But the first statement contradicts the tradition in 1 Sam. xxvii. 8, and as for the second, David's speech in 1 Sam. xxix. 8 ought not to be taken too literally. Although Achish had told David that the Philistines would not let him go with them to the battle, the latter saw at once that unless he simulated zeal for Achish, his liege lord might still force him to go. Nor need we doubt David's patriotism as king. He did not fight for glory, nor rule for merely selfish ends. His wars were 'wars of Jehovah'³ (i.e. wars sanctioned by Jehovah for the security of His land), and his conquest of Jebus proved to him (as we are told), not that he could safely tyrannize over his subjects, but

¹ Mrs. Oliphant, *Jerusalem*, pp. 44, 45.

² So Duncker, *Hist. of Antiquity*, ii. 141; but see Kamphausen's very thorough essay (referred to on p. 15), pp. 85-87. Had David actually been compelled to go with the Philistines, one cannot believe that he would have fought against his friends.

³ 1 Sam. xviii. 17, xxv. 28; cf. Num. xxi. 14. The phrase is in perfect harmony with the language of Deborah (Judg. v. 11, 13, 23). The prophet Amos recognizes a religious significance in David's conquests (Am. ix. 12, where read 'which were called').

that 'Jehovah had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake.'¹ His primary object was of course to knit together the tribes of Israel. To gain this, it was necessary to place some limits on the excessive tribal independence, nor need we deny that 'the Crethi and Plethi' (A.V. Cherethites and Pelethites) or the 'mighty men' (as they were also called) were maintained partly in view of possible internal discords. As little need we assert that David was right in so seldom consulting the 'elders' of Israel and Judah,² who represented the two great groups of Israelitish tribes. It was at any rate blameworthy not to consult them on the succession to the crown (still more so no doubt, to make no arrangement whatever on the subject), and hardly less so to attempt an important constitutional innovation entirely on his own responsibility.

All that we need assert is that David upheld the interests of Israel, not in a merely personal or tribal but in a national spirit. This was why he gave up Hebron as his seat of government; Ephraim was not to 'envy Judah,' nor Judah to 'vex Ephraim.' This, too, may be urged as an excuse for his 'numbering of the people,'³ which was probably intended as the

¹ 2 Sam. v. 12.

² 1 Sam. xxx. 26-31, 2 Sam. v. 3.

³ 2 Sam. xxiv. That the census was connected with the increased expenditure of government is a very natural supposition; that it had

first step towards a just and equal system of taxation for the legitimate purposes of government. It is also of course possible to take a different view, and regard this act as a sign of a growing despotic propensity. And in either case it would appear that David's procedure was not less repugnant to the prophetic guardians of religion than to the lovers of ancient custom. A sore pestilence visited the land, which was interpreted as a divine judgment, and David, who, as a sincerely religious man, could not but feel thus himself, desisted from his inauspicious attempt. He also made one important religious innovation, consequent on the capture of Jerusalem, without the authority of the elders, but for these he had of course other sanction, and whatever we may think of his projected taxation, his initiation of the great centralizing religious movement was a sound and necessary policy. His own deep religious feeling on the occasion of the installation of the ark ¹ he expressed

a military object, is clearly enough indicated in 2 Sam. xxiv. 2, which should run, 'And the king said to Joab and to the captains of the host which were with him' (see *v.* 4 and 1 Chron. xxi. 2, and cf. Driver *ad loc.*). See also the subtle remarks of Ewald, who justifies David on the ground that without regular taxes an organized and vigorous government would in the long run have been impossible (*History*, iii. 161). Of course, however, David was relatively rich through booty and the tribute of conquered nations, and the produce of his estates.

¹ The installation of the ark on Mount Zion cannot but have given a superior prestige to the new Israelitish sanctuary, and so have facilitated the one-sanctuary-law of Deuteronomy. We must not let our-

(not surely in Ps. xxiv. and ci.) but in the striking and evidently primitive words, '*Before Jehovah will I dance, who chose me before thy father (Saul) and before all his house, appointing me prince over Jehovah's people, over Israel: therefore will I play and dance before Jehovah.*'¹ Little could David have guessed the issues which hung on this important step, but it is to him that the world is historically indebted for the streams of spiritual life which have proceeded from Jerusalem.

As a lover of justice David was remembered to the latest generations. Jeremiah, writing in days when this essential quality of an Eastern king had become rare, indulges the bright vision of a 'righteous Branch' from the tree of David, who should 'execute judgment and justice in the land.'² Now David was personally a righteous man. A later writer declares that he '*turned not aside from anything that Jehovah commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.*'³ Many as were his opportunities of reaching selfish ends by crime, he availed himself, with that one exception, of none. He disdained to win the crown by slaying Saul

selves be blinded to this by the fact that the early prophets lay no stress on the national importance of the ark, or indeed of the temple (see W. R. Smith, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 428).

¹ 2 Sam. vi. 21 (cf. Sept.).

² Jer. xxiii. 5.

³ 1 Kings xv. 5.

when he had him in his power ;¹ he slew the murderers of Ishbosheth,² and the murderer (as David upon plausible grounds supposed him to be) of Saul.³ Nor was he behindhand in the administration of justice, until in his advancing years the burden became too great, so that Absalom could 'steal the hearts of the people' by supplying David's omission.⁴ Of his 'righteousness and equity' during his early wanderings we have evidence enough in the unsought testimony of the servants of Nabal, and in the wise law which he made to stop disputes over the division of spoil ;⁵ and if in the later years of his reign he could give the iniquitous sentence, 'Thou and Ziba divide the land,'⁶ yet in his prime he received this testimony (strangely confirmed by his own words in 2 Sam. xii. 5, 6), that he 'executed judgment and justice unto all his people.'⁷

Another fine quality of David in his best days is his regard for life, at any rate for Israelitish life. There are two fine stories that illustrate this. One is the account of the punishment (if punishment it was) of the numbering of the people, in which David says to Jehovah (and surely it was in his heart, even if it never rose to his lips), 'Lo, I have sinned, and I

¹ 1 Sam. xxiv., xxvi. ² 2 Sam. iv. 9-12. ³ 2 Sam. 14-16.

⁴ 2 Sam. xv. 2-6.

⁵ 1 Sam. xxv. 15, 16, xxx. 21-25.

⁶ 2 Sam. xix. 29. Either Mephibosheth was a traitor, or he was not.

⁷ 2 Sam. viii. 15.

have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done?'¹ The other is from a much more undoubtedly historical source, that same roll of David's heroes which contains the best account of the slaying of Goliath. David, as you remember, longed for the water of his own sweet native town, and the three mightiest of his men broke through the host of the Philistines, and went and took it. But David would not drink thereof; he poured it out unto Jehovah, and said, *'Be it far from me, Jehovah, that I should do this! The blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?'*² It was a true sacrificial act. The mutual love which it symbolized was precious in the sight of God, and may we not reverently call it a true though a far-off shadow of the love of Jesus?

Next in order to this I would place the truly regal quality of magnanimity. There were times in David's life when he 'heaped coals of fire' upon his enemy's head, when he 'delivered him that without cause was his enemy.'³ 'Twice,' says

¹ 2 Sam. xxiv. 17.

² 2 Sam. xxiii. 14-17.

³ See Ps. vii. 4, A.V. The rendering, however, is wrong. Many have found here an allusion to David's generosity to Saul. But the psalm is at any rate later than Jeremiah (see *B.L.*, p. 196). It is another psalm however (liv.) which an early editor assigned to this period, and, though this is not expressly said, we may suppose that Ps. liii. was referred to the Nabal-episode. Thus Pss. lii.-liv. became illustrations of the same series of events. Hence their juxtaposition.

Edward Irving, 'at the peril of his life, he brought his blood-hunter within his power, and twice he spared him, and would not be persuaded to injure a hair upon his head—who, when he fell in his high places, was lamented over by David with the bitterness of a son.' Twice may perhaps be saying too much. But once is enough to establish David's character for magnanimity. It may indeed be objected that David did but act as a son was bound to do, the covenant between Jonathan and David having made Saul David's adoptive father. But what an unnatural father the young hero had gained—a father who with jealous rage sought his son's life! So at least Abishai evidently probably felt—one of David's fearless nephews who accompanied him on that wild walk which brought them both before the sleeping monarch. Less chivalrous than David, he proposed to break the unwritten law of reverence for the sleeper[†] by slaying Saul. But David forbade him. He would not venture to call Saul his father; but 'who' (he said) 'can stretch

[†] Doughty, *A.D.*, i., 250. Comp. the story of the messengers sent 'to watch David, and to slay him *in the morning*' (1 Sam. xix. 11). Readers of the life of Mohammed will remember the projected but unaccomplished purpose of Mohammed's enemies to seize upon his person by night (Sprenger, *Leben Muhammad*, ii. 543). Dr. Marcus Dods compares David's generosity to that of Arthur's knight Pelleas, who could not slay his traitorous sleeping friend, but 'thought it sufficient rebuke to lay his naked sword across his throat.'

forth his hand against Jehovah's anointed and be guiltless?' Saul was not, like Sisera,¹ one of Israel's foreign oppressors; he was the divinely sanctioned head of his people, and Jehovah had not as yet cancelled his claim to respect. Nor was Saul perhaps really so ungrateful as the common histories report. This I can at any rate make probable; but I will first of all bring before you a few details from the more authentic of the two traditional reports which have come down to us.²

David the outlaw has taken refuge in a desert tract above the Dead Sea on its western side. Facing this barren region on the right hand there is a high hill bounded by deep valleys north and south. Saul, who is pursuing David, has encamped for the night at the head of one of these valleys, with steep cliffs on either side, and two wells of living water close by—so at least we may fill up the narrative from a careful explorer's notes.³ Here Saul expects to be well hidden from view. But David's scouts have discovered his camping-ground, and told David, who nobly resists the temptation to slay Saul, but carries away the king's tall spear and with it his water-cruise. He ascends one of the opposite hills, and cries aloud,

¹ Judg. iv. 21, 22. In Judg. v. 26, 27, however, Sisera is slain standing (another tradition?).

² See I Sam. xxvi.

³ Conder, *Pal. Fund Statement*, 1875, pp. 47, 48.

like the Homeric heroes. The first to awake is Abner the general ; the king sleeps a few minutes longer. David severely blames Abner for not having guarded his master better, ' for,' he says, ' there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord ' ; the king he does not presume to address. But Saul does not wait for him to do so. The cloud lifts from off his mind. He cannot see David, but he knows his voice. The years roll back ; father and son long to be reconciled. Saul speaks—' Is this thy voice, my *son* David ? ' And David answers, ' It is my voice, my lord, O king. Wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant ? for what have I done, or what evil is in my hand ? ' Then David makes that strange appeal to which I have referred already (p. 37), implying such confined views of the divinity of Jehovah, and the king replies, ' I have sinned ; return, my son David ; for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day.' ' So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.' Here certainly David shines most, but Saul wins our esteem and affection too. Perhaps you may question this ; the common histories make out that Saul was as bitter as ever against David even after his life had been spared. But upon analyzing Samuel into its component parts it appears that David was but once in a position to act thus

generously to Saul. He may have feared that Saul's repentance would not be lasting; but I venture to doubt this.¹ Psychologically it seems more probable that David had already begun to idealize the grand old king, and that the kindly words, 'Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,' express the secret thoughts of David in this never-to-be-forgotten night.

And now I will venture on a conjecture suggested by the same result of critical analysis. Accepting chap. xxvi. as more original than chap. xxiv., and reading it together with chap. xxv.,² we are led to the reasonable supposition that that noble woman Abigail, who had moderated the passion of David not long before, once again exerted her potent influence against the hasty shedding of blood. I cannot see that this is an illegitimate use of the imagination. The fault of the older writers was not so much their imaginativeness, as that their imagination was not controlled by a historical sense. Listen to the grateful words which the narrator puts into

¹ I admit, however, that the narrator himself ('Da') thought that Saul was still not quite to be trusted (see 1 Sam. xxvii. 1, 4).

² It is true that chap. xxv. 2 &c., belongs to 'Da' (see pp. 6, 7), and chap. xxvi. to SS., but both these narratives are historically valuable, and Abigail was certainly David's wife when the event described in chap. xxvi. took place. Very possibly too SS. in its original form gave some account of the Nabal-episode, though not one fine enough to be adopted by the editor.

the mouth of David (1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33), '*Blessed be Jehovah the God of Israel, who sent thee this day to meet me ; and blessed be thy wisdom, and blessed be thou, who hast kept me this day from bloodguiltiness, and from helping myself with mine own hand.*'

Nor is this the only recorded instance of our hero's magnanimity. Poor Christopher Smart, whose unequal poem 'David,' written in a lucid interval of madness, is known to many of us, has already mentioned it. David, he says, had a thoroughly sweet nature,—

Good—from Jehudah's genuine vein,
From God's best nature good in grain,
His aspect and his heart ;
To pity, to forgive, to save ;
Witness Engedi's conscious cave,
And Shimei's blunted dart.

Shimei, as we know, was that Benjamite of the family of Saul who cursed David, when he was fleeing from Absalom, as the murderer of Saul's grandsons. On David's return after Absalom's death, Shimei met him, 'when he would go over Jordan,' and did obeisance. He frankly confessed his sin, and asked pardon of David for it, since he was the first of the house of Joseph to go down to meet the king. David would not spoil the festive joy of the day by putting any one to death, so he as frankly forgave Shimei,

sealing his pardon with an oath.¹ This, I say, was conduct worthy of a king. Ah! but you forget the detestable sequel of the story—some secularist may observe. And even a genuine admirer of the Old Testament somewhere congratulates Hellas that its national heroes were not men like David, ‘who dies with the words of blood and perfidy on his lips, charging his son with the lost slaughterous satisfaction of his hate which he had sworn before God to forego.’² Now I fully share this repugnance to the conduct ascribed to David in 1 Kings ii. 1–9, and I agree with an eminent historian that even allowing for Oriental modes of feeling, ‘David’s instructions go beyond the limits of all that we can elsewhere find in those times.’³

I believe however that the objection so confidently brought falls to the ground upon a strict criticism of the narrative in 1 Kings i. and ii. It is, to begin with, certain that, in the period referred to, David’s vital powers were decaying, and that he was incapable of serious business. Joab and Nathan both knew this; and the former pressed the claims of Adonijah, the latter those of Solomon to the succession. It

¹ 2 Sam. xvi. 5–13; xix. 16–23. Kay supposes that Ps. vii. illustrates the former passage; Cush in the heading=Shimei (but see *B.L.*, pp. 229, 243; *Expositor*, March 1892, p. 234).

² Myers, *The Extant Odes of Pindar*, Intro., p. 17.

³ Duncker, *History of Antiquity*, ii. 145.

seemed at first as if Adonijah would gain the day. He had on his side, not only David's old companion and greatest subject Joab, but the king's faithful priest Abiathar, and all the official class in Judah. But Nathan 'the prophet' saw that Adonijah was not equal to the responsibilities of royalty, and, obtaining the assistance of Bathsheba brought the feeble king to accept Solomon as his successor. A most dramatic description is given of the crisis, but we can hardly be blind to the fact that it is the work of a partizan of Solomon. No blame need be imputed to the writer, who had espoused what he rightly thought the better cause. We cannot however abstain from criticizing his statements, for unless we do so we may unintentionally be unjust to David. The words which he ascribes to the *dramatis personæ* are for the most part psychologically possible, but those in 1 Kings ii. 2-9 (even if we omit vv. 2-4 as a much later insertion by a reader of Deuteronomy) ¹ are not at all what the dying king would be likely to have used. We have seen how weak in mind he was, and how careless of the interests of the kingdom; how improbable then that he should have given any testamentary instructions at all to the future king!

¹ Wellhausen, Stade, and Kautzsch regard 1 Kings ii. 1-9 as a later insertion. But it seems safer (see Budde, p. 264) to limit the insertion to vv. 2-4.

And though we must not attach too much importance to well-attested incongruities, yet we may say that very full evidence indeed would be required to make us believe that the speech in *17. 2-9* is authentic. For this supposed dying charge is diametrically opposed to what is told us of David's character elsewhere. David may indeed have guessed (if he was equal to the strain of thinking at all) that the new king, who would have the right to cancel his predecessor's amnesty, would fear to leave Joab's violent acts unexpiated and Shimei's solemn curse unneutralized by the deaths of the offenders ; but he was too noble to stir up vindictive feelings in another which in himself had long since been quelled. Joab in particular had a claim on his gratitude which a few passionate acts could not wholly extinguish, whereas Solomon, who was inferior in character to his father, may well have taken the first opportunity to rid himself of his lion-like foe. (Did Joab—the hero of a hundred fights—really become a craven at the last ? One may venture to doubt it.) It is not David therefore who is to be blamed, but a Hebrew narrator who sought to relieve the pious builder of the temple from the responsibility of some doubtful actions by ascribing them to the influence of David.

Lastly I come to David's religion, and inquire, Has it a bright as well as a dark side ? We have admitted

that truths now familiar to 'cottage-dames' were unknown to him; that his religious notions were, from a Christian point of view, neither elevated nor refined. The narrators (or some of them), and the editors who welded their work into a whole, have done what they could to mitigate the shock caused by many of the traditional facts by making David use beautifully devout expressions, some of which at any rate were certainly beyond his horizon. It is a grave question whether they have succeeded, at least for our generation; we should probably feel the moral difficulty of 2 Sam. viii. 1, 2 less, if the exquisite prayer and thanksgiving in 2 Sam. vii. 18-29 did not precede it. But so much is clear even upon a critical view of the narratives that David had a religious feeling both deeper and purer than that of either Saul or Solomon, and certainly nobler than that of the Bedouins with whom he has been unwisely compared¹—that he not only *loved* his God (as his very name reminded him to do²), but worked in

¹ Mr. Doughty compares David to the Bedouins, pious in speech but wicked in act (*A.D.*, ii. 39). He refers of course to David's copious religious phraseology, assuming the speeches in the narratives to be more historical than they are. Another traveller, writing especially for the religious public, has no hesitation in representing David as in some respects very much like a Bedouin; though on another page he says that David expressed religious ideas closely resembling those of our Lord's parables (Wilson, *In Scripture Lands*, 1891). All this is very confused and confusing.

² *Name of David*. David ('the beloved of . . .') is a shortened form

harmony with the chief religious authorities of his time (Gad and Nathan are specially mentioned). I have already referred to certain 'high moments' in David's religious life, when he may perhaps have risen somewhat above the gross notions of the multitude, and, if I may say so, proved himself the spiritual kinsman of the later prophets. It is not impossible that at some of these times he burst into song, and that if we had a sufficient number of his hymns, we might detect in them some faint but true germs of the religion of the Psalter.¹ At any rate he had a keen sense that he was called to be shepherd of Jehovah's people, and as the recompense of his fidelity he may even have looked forward to a long line of royal descendants. So far as his lights went, we may say that he 'walked with God,' and when through human frailty he gave way to sore temptation, he failed not to return to his God, not indeed with an impossible spirituality, but with unfeigned repentance. His afflictions, too, he bore with resignation, tracing them to their source in his own sinful conduct, but retaining a sure hope in the divine lovingkindness. How clearly does this come out in the story of his flight from Absalom! For surely it was not the

for Dōdayāhu (2 Chron. xx. 37; cf. Sept.), or Dodo ('the beloved of Him,' i.e. of Jehovah), a name which we shall meet with again in studying the story of Goliath (p. 81). Compare Solomon's early name, Jedidiah; also Dido.

¹ A mere conjecture; see *B.L.*, p. 191.

mere collapse of premature old age, but a renewed sense of guilt, which produced that strange resolution, 'Arise, and let us flee' (2 Sam. xv. 14).

Now what more can we need to justify us in reverencing David as a good and great man, no spotless knight, and yet a man after God's purpose? Can we fail to be struck by the manifold contrasts between the son of Jesse and the heroes of the preceding age? He is no doubt the child of the past, but he is also one of the heralds of the better future. There is much in him that repels, there is also much that attracts us. There is, if we judge him historically, but one great blot in his record; there are, even with our limited knowledge, several brightly illuminated passages which gladden the Christian heart. How is it that the better elements in the Israelitish character spring at once in David into a new life? What is it that makes David so different from his fierce nephew Joab? Surely it is that nature in him has been touched (as we say) by grace; it is that, with all his illusions, he had what is called in Heb. xi. 'faith.' That he is in any full sense a type of Him who is the 'finisher of faith,' I will not say; *that* honour must be reserved for that deeply spiritual figure which is the speaker of so many of the psalms—that second David—the Church-nation of later times. But we may affirm that till Jesus Christ came no one

exercised such a personal charm as the historical David, and the best proof of this is that he was idealized by the inspired writers of later ages. The process began in the times of the narrators of Samuel; it closed, as we have seen, in those of the Chronicler. Midway came the great prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. To them the word 'David' became the symbol¹ of that ideal king of the future who was afterwards called the Messiah, and whom we believe on sure grounds to have come in the person of the Son of Mary. 'Of this man's seed hath God according to promise brought unto Israel a saviour, Jesus.'²

Now I venture to ask, in conclusion, Have you lost anything for which in your heart of hearts you cared by accepting these carefully sifted results of modern study? The force of truth may have compelled you to reject what Cardinal Newman³ calls (more aptly than he is aware himself) 'the portent of a blood-stained holiness.' Or to put it in other words, you have received a new and more thoroughly Church-view of the 51st psalm, and have been built up thereby in the sense of your close dependence on Christ's body, the Church. You have also gained a fresh insight into the truth of those New Testament words, 'By divers portions and in divers manners

¹ Jer. xxx. 9; Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24, xxxvii. 24, 25.

² Acts xiii. 23.

³ In his poem called 'David and Jonathan.'

God spake in time past unto the fathers,'¹ and you have learned to appreciate better the worth of spiritual religion by seeing how slowly and gradually it was revealed. Sadly imperfect were the early agents in the historical process of what I may call religious discovery, but you will not on that account disavow your connexion with them. The acorn is a prophecy of the oak ; the chrysalis of the butterfly ; David of the psalmists ; the psalmists of Christ.

I venture also, with some hesitation and only from a sense of duty, to address another question to you, which may seem perhaps, though I do not so mean it, to partake of the nature of a reproach? How is it that the few discourses, in which, side by side with the affirmation of facts, there has been a gentle attempt to eradicate errors, have been found so much more stimulating than the many sermon-studies in which for the three previous summers I have given nothing but positive, constructive truth on one of the deepest parts of the Bible?² Why should the inevitable negation which sooner or later every teacher of religion must against his will put forth be more exciting to any minds than the wholesome facts revealed by a free but devout Bible study? Why, even in these few discourses have the so-called negative parts been fastened upon by some unauthorized critics

¹ Heb. i. 1.

² See preface.

here to the exclusion of the affirmative and constructive elements in which I myself take such great delight? Evidently there are two answers which might be given to this ; permit me to choose the more favourable one. There is among the laity a growing consciousness that the historical setting in which spiritual truth is ordinarily presented to them is, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, not in all respects as trustworthy as could be wished. Consequently some lay students at any rate listen with more attention to a teacher when he denies than when he affirms, not being aware that among those who have thoroughly studied the Old Testament from a modern point of view the period of negation and destruction is past, and the work of gentle and gradual reconstruction has begun.

We are, to put the matter plainly, in the process of rediscovering and reinterpreting large parts of the Old Testament. Just as the Reformers rediscovered St. Paul,—that is, found out neglected sides of his teaching, so but in a much fuller sense devout critical students in our day are seeking by the help of the Spirit of truth to rediscover, and as they rediscover to Christianize and popularize, the historical meaning of the Old Testament. How great the gain will be both to the religion of those who profess and call themselves Christians and to the defence of Bible-truth

against those who profess and call themselves unbelievers, I have already pointed out. We want to get nearer to essential facts and essential truths ;—we cannot dispense with either. But we can only do this by genuine study. If you have but little leisure, give what you can of this. If you have much leisure, give of your abundance. But do not waste either little or great leisure by studying on wrong methods. Choose some Old Testament book, and acquaint yourself with its contents, according to the Revised Version or some other trustworthy translation, and then study from end to end some good and thoroughly modern book, conveying the best results of modern study in a popular manner. You might, for instance, choose Isaiah, which is in many respects the central book of the Old Testament, and study it in connexion with the excellent popular works of Driver and George Adam Smith. And above all, do not forget another kind of work still more fundamentally necessary—that of personal appropriation of known spiritual truth. Live near to God, and every kind of knowledge will help you, even in your religious life ; forget Him, and there are no intellectual gains which will compensate you for this supreme mistake. ‘Strengthen ye’ therefore ‘the feeble knees, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not.’

CHAPTER IV.

DAVID AND GOLIATH.

I.

Ps. viii. 2. With the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast established a stronghold because of thine enemies, to still the enemy and the avenger.

1 SAM. xvii. 45. Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear and with a javelin: but I come to thee in the name of Jehovah Sabáoth.

THERE is not much local scenery in the Psalms. Of moral scenery, if I may use the phrase, there is a great deal. You can at a glance form a shrewd conjecture as to the date of a psalm—though this must of course be verified by critical tests—from the moral and spiritual tone of the writer. The second verse of the 8th psalm makes it impossible to place the poem before the period when the Jews had fully learned the blessedness of humility and of faith, when in fact the nation had become a church. Of this

humility and faith the psalmist takes 'babes and sucklings' as the symbols or emblems, just as our Lord does in those glorious words, 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.'¹ The Jews, under their successive masters, Persia, Egypt, Syria, Rome, had ample opportunity of confirming themselves in this new spiritual lesson—new, I call it, because so long as the Jews had some material wealth and political independence, they continually neglected the assurance of the prophet that 'in quietness and in confidence (i.e. trust in God) was their (true) strength.'² The moral scenery of the 8th psalm enables us therefore to form a sound conjecture as to its date. As I pointed out some years ago, it was probably not written by David, to whose circumstances it makes no allusion, and whose spiritual horizon it far transcends, but by some inspired temple-poet after the return from the Exile.³ But there is one beautiful episode in the traditional life of David himself which suggests somewhat the same lesson as the psalm, and which supplies that picturesque local scenery in which the psalm is deficient. I refer to the well-known narrative of the victory of

¹ Matt. xi. 25, ἀπεκάλυψας αὐτὰ ὑπῖσις. Cf. Matt. xxi. 16, ἐκ στόματος ὑπῖων.

² Isa. xxx. 15.

³ Cf. Part II., chap. vii.

David over Goliath, in which David represents the 'babes' and Goliath 'the enemy and the avenger.' May the spirit of the 8th psalm sink into our minds, so that we may derive from that ancient narrative the full moral and spiritual profit which it was providentially designed to give ! For it is to some extent an allegory, though not a conscious or exact allegory like the immortal *Faerie Queene* and the *Pilgrim's Progress*. We cannot do more than open it to-day ; there is much that we shall only see when the whole story lies before us. God grant us all open eyes and ears !

There is no one mentioned in the Old Testament, except indeed Jeremiah, of whom we know so much as of David, and perhaps for this reason there is no one who is so dear to 'the general heart of men' as David. Our own great and good Alfred must of course be still nearer and dearer to us, but next to Alfred I think that we love no historical personage, certainly no historical king, as much as David. We have not indeed a complete and exact biography of David from the first, but of what great man of antiquity can it be said that we have this ? There is first of all a twilight period, for which we have only a faint and sometimes inconsistent tradition ; this extends to David's flight from the court of Saul ; after that we have a fairly exact historical knowledge.

It is a portion of the twilight period which I invite you to study with me to-day. We are told in 1 Sam. xvi. 15-23 that Saul, seized with morbid melancholy sent for 'a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that was cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and Jehovah was with him.' Here we meet with David as already a grown-up man, whose versatile genius was well-known, and whose warlike exploits proved him to be in the enjoyment of divine favour. We are further told that whenever Saul had an attack of his disease, David took up his harp (or guitar), and played, and the king obtained relief; also that Saul loved David greatly, and made him his armour-bearer.¹ Then the scene shifts. In a chapter which we all learned to love at our mothers' knees, we see David again as a mere shepherd-boy who has come up from the country to see his brothers in the camp (1 Sam. xvii.). With evident sympathy

¹ Edersheim (*Israel under Samuel, Saul, and David*, p. 86) thinks that this office was a purely nominal one, i.e. that David remained a stranger to the use of armour (cf. 1 Sam. xvii. 38, 39). This idea he borrowed from Keil, but probably abandoned when he accepted the principles of the critical analysis of the narrative books. Certainly we find no trace elsewhere of merely titular rank at the Israelitish courts. Joab's armour-bearer was a highly distinguished warrior (2 Sam. xxiii. 37), and so was Jonathan's (1 Sam. xiv. 1-14); i.e. they were not mere slingers, but accustomed to the use of sword and spear. Köhler (*Bibl. Gesch.*, ii. 190) thinks that David was only one of several armour-bearers. He refers to 2 Sam. xviii. 15; but does this make it much easier to regard 1 Sam. xvi.-xviii. as a consistent historical narrative? See also Stanley's art. 'Joab' in Smith's *D.B.*

the writer describes how a terrible giant is slain by this young and earnestly religious Bethlehemite with no other weapon but a sling and a stone. A complete victory over the Philistines follows, but when the king inquires who the young champion is, not even Abner can inform him: 'As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell,' are his words. Abner is therefore directed to find out whose son the 'stripling' is. The general prefers however to let David answer for himself; so the boy is brought to Saul, who asks him, 'Whose son art thou, boy?' And David answers, 'I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.' Is there not a great difficulty here? Why does not Saul's eye light up with recognition at the sight of his minstrel? And why does not David recal himself to the king's recollection? Do not tell me that he was too modest. Such false modesty is unknown to Orientals.¹ Various wild attempts have been made to smooth away the difficulty;² but the only natural

¹ See Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, p. 568.

² The eminent sceptical critic Bayle (1647-1706) is not too severe on these well-meant but futile attempts (*Dictionary*, iv. 538-9). Suffice it to mention one of them which has been adduced by a Rochester critic. Saul's question, it is said, need not imply a failure to recognize David; his object was to inform himself as to the parentage of his future son-in-law (see xvii. 25). But, according to xvi. 19, Saul knew this already. The discrepancy remains unaccounted for, and the only solution is that afforded by the critical analysis. According to SS, Saul and David had not met before, and the former naturally asked who David is. But the individual in primitive times derived half his im-

explanation is surely this—that we have two independent accounts of David's early life, and that the writer of the later one unintentionally contradicts the work of his predecessor.

This result is in complete accordance with facts of which few educated persons can be ignorant. We most of us know by this time that whoever edited the Book of Genesis compiled it in the most skilful manner out of different documents, and we can only be grateful for the information that the Books of Samuel were produced by a similar process. It puts an immense strain upon our faith to believe that everything in these books is equally accurate, and that the different accounts can be always reconciled. In the case of no other book should we attempt this. As we read the old Roman traditions we say, some accounts clearly come from one who stood near the events ; others do not. Besides this, inspiration cannot destroy the original differences in the minds of men. The sacred writers, though 'borne along by the Holy Spirit,' are by no means mere automata. While some care most for the truth of history, others prefer the truth of poetry, which is 'a striking proof,' as Dean Stanley has well said, 'of that universal

portance from his family, and the young champion had won the king's daughter to wife ; therefore Saul put his question thus, 'Whose son is the stripling?' (xvii. 55 : cf. xviii. 18).

Providence by which the religion of the Bible was adapted to suit, not one class of mind only, but many in every age of time.'¹

What, then, is the truth of history as regards David's first introduction to Saul? It is contained in that older account to which I have referred, and it amounts to this—that David was one of Saul's most valiant warriors who happened (if we may use the word) to be also clever with his tongue and with his harp, and whose music was again and again the providential instrument of the king's recovery. That he was a mere 'boy' or 'stripling' is neither stated nor implied in this narrative. Next, with regard to the slaughter of Goliath. Not to quote foreign myths or legends,² we read in our own great prose-epic

¹ Stanley, *Sinai and Palestine*, Preface, p. xxiv. ; cf. my own *Elijah ; or, The Hallowing of Criticism*, p. 30, 'Some Bible stories are pure facts ; others, and those the most delightful, are mingled fact and poetry.' Strange, that so good and wise a man as F. D. Maurice had not grasped this distinction ! He even speaks as if 'heroic lays' gave him no 'sense of reality,' and marvels that the lay-theory should have 'become so popular' (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 45). What a penury of the imagination is implied here ! Contrast the lovely and natural words which Milton gives to his Manoah,—

. . . there will I build him
A monument, and plant it round with shade
Of laurel ever green, and branching palm,
With all his trophies hung, and acts inrolled
In copious legend or sweet lyric song.

² See Goldziher (*Hebrew Mythology*, pp. 109, 256, 430), who regards our narrative as based upon a solar myth. But the features in David which seem to this writer mythical are wanting in the more historical slayer of Goliath—Elhanan.

Morte Darthur of a giant Galapas whom king Arthur slew with his sword Excalibur. Is the slaughter of Goliath as mythical a tale as this? There is no occasion to think so. The only important question is, whether David or another warrior slew this Philistine? In the composite Book of Samuel we find two inconsistent accounts. The one is given in 1 Sam. xvii., and is also presupposed in 1 Sam. xxi. 9; the other in a very ancient record of David's heroes which states (2 Sam. xxi. 19) that Goliath of Gath, 'the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam,' was killed in the reign of David by a mighty man of Bethlehem called Elhanan.¹ The author of the Books of Chronicles was much perplexed by this double account of Goliath's death, and to clear away the inconsistency supposed that Elhanan slew not Goliath but Goliath's brother.² In spiritual matters this writer certainly carried a message to the men of

¹ Just so the killing of a lion under great difficulties is ascribed in 2 Sam. xxiii. 20 to another of David's 'mighty men.' Note that the Elhanan mentioned above is called in 1 Chron. xx. 5 'the son of Jair' (see above, p. 10). In 1 Chron. xi. 26 we read of 'Elhanan the son of Dodo, of Bethlehem,' while in *vv.* 12-14 'Eleazar, the son of Dodo, the Ahohite' is mentioned with David as fighting with the Philistines at Pas-dammim (= Ephes-dammim); cf. 2 Sam. xxiii. 9, *Var. Bible*. 'Dodo' is a longer form of 'David'; see pp. 10, 67.

² See 1 Chron. xx. 5, where Lahmi or Lakhmi, the name of Goliath's supposed brother, is obviously obtained from *beth-hallakhmi* 'the Bethlehemite,' unless some bold man should connect it with the name of the Babylonian god Lakhmu or Lukhmu (already brought into relation to 'Bethlehem' by Mr. Tomkins).

his time ; his whole work breathes a spirit of pure and tender piety. But, like many good men of a later age, he was entangled in the meshes of literalism ; that is, he read the Books of Samuel as if they were the work of one writer, and as if they always presented a prosaic, matter-of-fact narrative. We must not venture to blame him for this ; it would be historically unfair. He lived long after the golden age of Hebrew imaginative writing had closed,¹ and it was hard for him to enter into the spirit of an earlier literature. Other channels for conveying spiritual truth had been providentially discovered in and before his time, and in one of these—a style of writing which we may almost call the church-historical—he was at home. As an inspired teacher he deserves our veneration ; but should we not give some thanks to those who seek to unfold the beauty and true significance of that which he misunderstood ? Why, in the name of a God whose works and ways are infinitely various, may we not study some of the lovely narratives of the Old Testament as prose-poems—not indeed as mere fantastic romances, but as stories employed by specially gifted Israelites as the vehicles of important truths ?

It is my hope to be able to convince you that the narrative of David and Goliath is one of these stories,

¹ See above, pp. 22, 23.

and that, good as the truth of pure history may be, the truth of poetry—of that poetry which is idealized history—may, for the purpose of edification, be even better. Grant me then your attention while I first of all seek to bring before you the scene of this beautiful narrative. Visit with fancy's eye the hills to the east of Bethlehem, not so very different to-day from what they were 3000 years ago. The painter will not find much to attract him on those bare uplands, but those who study the land as a commentary on the Book of books may be startled to see some young shepherd seated with his flock at noon under the silvery gray olive-trees which break the monotony of the landscape. Perhaps he is singing, and in this case you will not be charmed by his melody; or perhaps he is practising with his sling, a home-made weapon which is not yet entirely supplanted by modern arms. At once you think of David, but David in the most important respects was a shepherd of a higher stamp than any you will see now. I do not indeed forget that a Syrian shepherd has been trained to be an evangelist to the Bedouins; God bless him and teach him and speed him in his journeys!¹ But David

¹ The Bedouins have so little religion (see Mr. Doughty's painfully interesting travels in Arabia) that the coolest sceptic will not scoff at this new 'Gideon,' sent out by friends of Mrs. Mott's Syrian schools. In one of his last letters Bishop French made kindly reference to 'Gideon.'

was the son of one of the elders or chief men of Bethlehem, and the best training, both moral and physical, which a well-born Israelitish boy could then have would not be withheld from him. He would certainly not be always with the 'few sheep in the pasture-land'; sometimes, like Saul, in quest of some wandering animals, sometimes on some family errand, he would accompany his brothers through the neighbouring hill-country. Hence, when the Philistines, impatient at Saul's growing power, determined to make a fresh attempt to put down the Israelitish patriots, and were known to be not many miles from Bethlehem, the young shepherd was perfectly able to go by the most direct route over the hills to the place where Saul's army was encamped.

There are probably few passages in the early narratives which are so lighted up by the researches of travellers as 1 Sam. xvii. With the help of a map and photographs it is not difficult to picture to ourselves the Philistine and the Israelitish armies in their respective positions. Let us first read the description in Samuel.

'And the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and they were gathered together at Socoh which belongeth to Judah, and pitched between Socoh and Azekah in Ephes-dammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched in the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side; and the ravine was between them.'

Socoh, near which the Philistines were encamped, still keeps very nearly its ancient name. It is on the southern side of a great broad valley now called 'the valley of acacias'¹ but anciently 'the valley of terebinths,' which extends from the hills which bound Philistia on the one side to the very heart of the hills of Judah on the other. The Philistines had marched unchallenged from their own rich lowlands through the hill-passes to this great valley which is no doubt the ancient valley of Elah. But when they got to the point at which they would have to strike northeastward, they found it already occupied by the Israelites. So at least a study of the map compels one to suppose. In other words, the camp of Saul was on the slope of a hill about two miles from the Philistines on the northern side of the valley of Elah.² It is a hill at

¹ The Wady es-Sanṭ is so-called from the acacia bushes which border it on either side. It rises near Hebron, and runs northward by Keilah, Nezib, and Adullam to Socoh, and thence westward to the sea by Gath and Ashdod (Conder). Shuweikeh (1145 feet above the sea), the ancient Socoh, has still many ruins of an old town. It lies nearly at the point at which the Wady es-Sanṭ bends round to the south-east and becomes the Wady es-Sur. I doubt whether Conder is right in identifying Ephes-dammim with Beit Fased in spite of the suggestiveness of its name ('a place of bleeding'). The Philistines need not, it seems to me, have troubled themselves about Saul if they were encamped at Beit Fased; they could have gone on to Hebron by the Wady es-Sur. They stayed, because Saul's position had to be forced. Beit Nettif is close to the old Roman road, which probably followed as much as possible the ancient paths.

² Beit Nettif (1527 feet) is a village nearly opposite Shuweikeh, but more eastward. The statements in the text are on the basis of the

the head of a minute cross-valley or glen, down which in winter runs a small torrent-stream. From the summit there is a splendid view over a rich and varied country, and close by the old Roman road can still be traced, which probably marks the route followed by Saul's army on its way to the field of action. There was plenty of wood on the spot to cut down for an intrenchment, and on either side of the gently ascending glen archers and slingers could be posted to harass an enemy. Try now to imagine the scene. Yonder are the camps of the opposing armies; you can but faintly discern them, however, through the bushes. In the valley beneath barley is already ripening. The torrent is nearly dried up; its bed is strewn with smooth white pebbles, and the red sides of the bed are in places so steep that you might call it a valley 'within a valley.' It is this torrent-bed which the narrator, with perfect knowledge of the country, refers to under the name of the ravine: 'the ravine,' he says (not 'the valley'), 'was between them.'¹

But it was tedious work for the Philistines, looking

Survey Map. The best description is perhaps that of Dr. W. Miller (*The Least of all Lands*, p. 130 &c.), who takes the break in the line of heights, where a gentle ascent with a watercourse leads up to Beit Nettif to be what is termed the valley of Elah in 1 Sam. xvii.

¹ The credit of having made this out belongs to Major Conder (see his *Tentwork*, ii. 160, 161, and cf. *Pal. Explor. Fund Statement*, 1875, p. 193).

at their enemies across the cornfields, and longing to move on to those blue hills of Judah in the distance. If the Israelites could only be drawn into the valley, the war-chariots would soon decide the fortune of the day. This however was difficult to accomplish; so the Philistines hit upon a strange device to change the face of affairs. Listen to what took place.—On a certain day, the two armies had been drawn up as usual in front of their respective intrenchments. It promised to be again an idle day, each party being content with observing the other. All at once two of the Philistines are seen to detach themselves from the rest, and advance through a gap in the cornfields towards the Israelites. One is a man of ordinary size, bearing with difficulty an enormous shield. The other is of such vast stature that his armour-bearer seems, in Hebrew phrase, ‘like a grasshopper.’ His name is Goliath, and his ten feet of stature, cased in glittering armour,¹ strikes the spectators dumb with astonishment. At length the gigantic form is quite near. Goliath stands still and cries with sonorous voice,

*‘Why are ye come out to set your battle in array?
am not I a Philistine, and you servants to Saul?’*

¹ The description of Goliath’s spear seems to have become a fixed detail of the Goliath-story. It occurs again in the rival narrative, 2 Sam. xxi. 19.

choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants : but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day ; give me a man, that we may fight together.'

Now can you not understand the clever expedient of the Philistines ? It was not at all a novelty in primitive times for contests to be decided by a duel between champions from either side ; this we know from the lays of the Greeks and Romans. The novelty was in sending out a giant, one of that very race which the Israelites had all but destroyed, and bidding him defy the Israelitish army to produce a champion to meet him. That any such champion would appear must have seemed to Goliath highly improbable. He must have hoped either to throw the Israelites into consternation by his terrible aspect and vaunting words, or to provoke attack from a number of angry warriors. In the former case, the Israelites might be expected to abandon their resistance, and submit again to the yoke of the Philistines ; in the latter, a general engagement between the two armies could not be long delayed. The blood of the Israelitish army would be thoroughly heated, and they would rush to meet their enemies in the plain. (For at present, as you remember, the Israelites are

separated from the valley of Elah by a break in the northern line of heights, through which a small glen leads to their fortified hill-camp.) What actually happened, we know. The scornful bravado of the giant paralyzed the energies of the Israelites. ‘*When Saul and all the men of Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.*’

Hitherto we have been chiefly indebted to travellers for a clear comprehension of the story. But now we must once more have recourse to special students of the original who, being experts in a different field, can often find out things which escape the most observant traveller. Thus much, I hope, we have already learned, viz. that chap. xvii. does not give the earliest account of the introduction of David to king Saul. Two narratives proceeding from different writers, and representing different traditions, have been welded together. But this is not all. The second of these narratives, in its present form, has itself been added to by various writers; and the object of the faithful student must be to remove all the absolutely certain excrescences. The first attempt to do this was made in that famous Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures which is so often quoted in the New Testament. If you turn to 1 Sam. xvii. in the Septuagint, you will find that it is the shorter by no less than 26 verses (viz. vv. 12-31, 41, 50, and 55-58).

The consequences of this large abridgment are rather serious. The delightful sketches of David the shepherd-boy leaving his flock at the bidding of his father, nobly indignant at the challenge of Goliath, and replying with sweet gentleness to the taunt of a brother, fade into thin air. Will the story, I wonder, bear these omissions? And is the object of the Jewish-Greek translators gained by them? Do they make the story a complete and harmonious account of the slaying of Goliath? Now the Greek version is not to be lightly esteemed, and there are some good scholars who follow it here.¹ It is however by no means an infallible authority. Literary criticism began in Alexandria, but it could not stop there. We moderns often reject the Septuagint's renderings; why should we not also criticize its decisions on the text?

Let us then candidly admit that, ancient as the Greek version is, we cannot here altogether follow it.

¹ Kirkpatrick thought (in 1880) that the Sept. gave the original form of the text, the additional passages now found in the Hebrew having been added later from another source (*Samuel*, i. 243). Similarly W. R. Smith, *The O. T. in the Jewish Church*, 1881, p. 127; Woods, *Studia Biblica*, i. (1885), pp. 29, 30; Cornill, *Königsberger Studien*, i. 25-30, and *Einleitung* (1891), p. 111. But Wellhausen (*Die Composition des Hexateuchs*, &c., p. 250), Kuenen (*Onderzoek*, ed. 2, i. 392), Driver (*Samuel*, p. 116), and Budde (*Richter und Samuel*, p. 217), rightly conclude that the omissions in Sept. are dictated by a desire to harmonize as far as possible the inconsistent reports. Sept. also omits xviii. 1-5, 9-11, 17-19, and 29b-30.

There is no object indeed in making such large omissions, now that we have discovered two independent versions of David's first introduction to Saul. The Septuagint translators, not having found this out, endeavoured at all costs to harmonize chap. xvii. with chap. xvi.; but our only object can be to harmonize chap. xvii. with itself. We are bound with the tenderest care to lop off all real excrescences, and so restore the lovely narrative to its original form. A few verses and parts of verses are all that we need omit, and these have a full claim to be appended at the foot of the page, that we may realize the deep interest taken in the Goliath-story by later editors and readers. For instance, at the point which we have now reached, the narrator doubtless expects us to be thrilled with horror at the critical position of the Israelites, and to long to know how they got out of it. Of course he does not wish to spoil his story by satisfying our curiosity too soon. A new personage is about to come on the scene, and he must be fittingly introduced, for the author of this narrative has not mentioned David before. But the introduction must of course be performed in a rapid, simple manner. And if verses 12-16 are what the original author wrote, the introduction of David is not in accordance with this requirement. What is the explanation of this? I reply that the original work

has been spoiled, first, by an attempt to harmonize two inconsistent accounts of Jesse's family. According to one, which is supported by 1 Sam. xvi. 6-11, he had eight sons; according to another, with which the author of Chronicles seems to agree, he had only four. It has been spoiled, secondly, by an attempt in *v.* 15 to harmonize two different pictures of David, the one as the armour-bearer of Saul, the other as a shepherd-boy. And thirdly, by the insertion of the statement that Goliath presented himself twice a day for forty days. There is a want of moderation in this improbable statement, of which the original writer, who was a genius, would not have been capable. The interpolator thought perhaps to give David an opportunity of coming from Bethlehem and meeting Goliath; but why put such an unnecessary strain upon the imagination of the reader?

Till some skilful restorer of the fine old picture has been found, it will be best for ordinary students to hasten past verses 12-16, and relax the strain upon their feelings by the prose-poet's idyllic sketch of David at home in his family. Of the boy's mother no mention is made; we hear of her once only, and that upon a later occasion.¹ She *must* have had a voice however (for women were highly honoured in ancient Israel) in the consultation which took place

¹ 1 Sam. xxii. 3.

at Bethlehem respecting David's brothers. 'The young men are in sore peril; Jehovah guard them and bring them back! They are perhaps also in need of provision. Let young David, who knows the ground so well, rise before dawn, and try to reach the camp before the call to arms. Let him look how his brothers fare, and bring back their "pledge"—some token, that is, of their welfare. And for provision, let him take a measure of fresh parched wheat and ten of the large thin wafer-like loaves, so sweet to the taste, for his brothers, and also as a respectful gift to the captain of their thousand, who doubtless has bread enough already, ten slices of soft cheese.' So David leaves the sheep, at his old father's bidding, 'in the hand of a keeper,' lades the ass with the provision,¹ and hastened to the camp. He is in time, or, let us rather say, in God's time, which is the best of all times. But he does not think so himself at first; and why? Because, as he crosses the hill to the intrenchment, the main body of the army comes pouring out of the tents. The sight quickens David's movements. He hastily takes off the baggage, and gives it 'to the appointed keeper, runs to the army, and salutes his brothers' (v. 22). 'But what sounds are those that I hear again, and again repeated?'²

¹ In 1 Sam. xvii. 20, for 'and took,' read 'and laded (the ass).'

² In 1 Sam. xvii. 20 (end) render, 'and kept shouting.' It is a frequentative (see Driver *ad loc.*).

Can this be the war-cry? What a faint and spiritless substitute for that piercing shout for which Israelites are famed!’ ‘It is true, O David; but there is a reason. For yonder is a sight to blanch the face with terror—the monster, whom we saw but yesterday, is striding forward again, armed to the teeth; and it is his shouting which enfeebles ours—those cuttingly insulting words, “I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together.”’ Such was doubtless the half-spoken, half-gesticulated conversation between David and his brothers. These were brave men—they had beaten the Philistines not long ago; but now they were, by their own confession, cowards. Can we imagine a greater moral torture than this?

The Israelites did their best indeed to galvanize themselves into a spurious energy. In their talk they reminded one another of what they all knew but too well—the deadly nature of Goliath’s insult, and a report spread that Saul had promised his daughter in marriage to the man who would kill this Philistine, and give him other substantial rewards. There was one person however on whom Goliath produced an exactly opposite impression. A mighty heart beat in the breast of that shepherd-boy. The insult to Israel and to Israel’s God fired him with indignation. The thought flashed across his mind, ‘Jehovah cannot

leave this insult unavenged ; may it not be His will to avenge it through me ?' But David was human—very human ; his animating principle was not solely religious. Faith and ambition went side by side in his mind ; his enthusiasm was not divorced, as it would seem, from prudent calculation.¹ He went from group to group of the advanced guard, to which his brothers probably belonged, verifying the report which had reached him of dazzling rewards for the successful champion. Of his own ripening resolution he breathed not a word, but something in the expression of his face seems to have struck Eliab his eldest brother. You know that fine poem of Wordsworth on the Happy Warrior, in which these lines occur,—

But who, if he be called upon to face
Some awful moment to which Heaven has joined
Great issues, good or bad for human kind,
Is happy as a Lover, and attired
With sudden brightness, like a Man inspired.

Such may have been David's outward aspect, which Eliab, partly through his own fault, tried in vain to interpret.

'And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men ; and Eliab's anger was kindled against

¹ At this point the Goliath-story connects itself with the more accurate historical tradition (see 1 Sam. xviii. 17). The reward promised is like that offered by Caleb, Judg. i. 12.

David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the pasture-land? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.'

Poor Eliab! He was suffering deeply with and for his people, and could not conceive how any one could look bright and happy amidst the general gloom.¹ But also we must say, cruel and unbrotherly Eliab! Envy breathes in every word of his speech. He knew that David had talents superior to his own, and leaped to the conclusion that he had deserted his humble charge in quest of excitement. But the buzzing of the insect tribe cannot hurt one who has a great purpose. '*And David said, What have I now done? Was it not a mere word?*'—that is, 'How have I injured any one by asking a simple question and expressing my natural feelings as a religious and patriotic Israelite?'

We may be sure that in writing down these words the narrator had in view a much needed moral lesson, viz. that railing should not be answered with railing, but that the offended person should seek to pacify the offender by gentle words. That this was not beyond

¹ Note that Eliab betrays no consciousness of David's appointment as (future) king. 'How it was that his anointing attracted so little notice, it is difficult to tell,' says Mrs. Oliphant. The reason is clear; it is because 1 Sam. xvi. 1-13 is due to the imaginative editor (see p. 7).

the horizon of a narrator of the post-Davidic period we may see from Prov. xv. 1, xxv. 15. The writer might have expressed himself thus,—‘Let this mind be in you which was also in David,’ but this would not have been in accordance with the style of a narrator. An epic poet must not be didactic, and a really great story-teller is a rough-hewn epic poet. But a preacher *can* say this, and so let me now say how much occasion we have in daily life to remember the ‘soft answer’ of David. He had received a great provocation, and might have excused a cutting answer by the excitement of his novel and unexpected circumstances; but no, he had found out ‘a more excellent way.’ The story-teller seems in this feature of the description carried beyond himself; he looks forward—that is, the Spirit by which unconsciously he was guided looked forward—to a far greater than David, ‘who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.’¹ The reply of David to Eliab is in fact a far-off, unconscious anticipation, of those glorious words ascribed to our Lord Jesus Christ,—‘If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil, but if well, why smitest thou me?’

¹ Following the Septuagint.

CHAPTER V.

DAVID AND GOLIATH (*continued*) ; *with Note on* 2 Sam. xxi. 9.

1 SAM. xvii. 32.—And David said to Saul, Let not my lord's heart fail because of him ; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.

SAD indeed is the condition to which a great dread has reduced the Israelites. Nerveless, faithless, hopeless, they can neither fight nor pray. But though as yet they know it not, faith and hope have returned in the person of David. At once a little stir arises in the army. The bystanders report the strange questions of a bright-looking country-lad to the king, who desires to see him. So David has his first introduction to the brave but unhappy king, who leans moodily on his spear, wishing perhaps that he were not a king that he might himself volunteer to be the champion of Israel. There is no time for ceremony. Young David speaks first. 'Let not my lord's heart

fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.' The king replies gently dissuading him. '*Thou art not able to fight with him, for thou art but a boy, and he a man of war from his youth.*'¹ How old, then, is David? Those who listened to this popular tale in primitive times had no doubt a very distinct image of the young hero before them, and even we if we listen with hearing ears may obtain the like. The effectiveness of the story largely depends on David's really being a boy, not yet of an age to fight. In *v.* 56 he is called a 'stripling,'² but we find the same word applied in *1 Sam.* xx. 22 to one who is called a few verses further³ on 'a little boy (or lad).' In *v.* 42, we are told that David was disdained by the giant on account of his ruddy complexion. He was therefore not like that young Sulamite girl, whom her brothers (or step-brothers) had set to keep the vineyards, and who says modestly to the daughters of Jerusalem, 'Look not upon me,

¹ נַעַר 'boy'; מִנְעָרָיו 'from his youth.' Unless we render thus, there is no perfect antithesis. For נַעַר in the sense of 'young man' can be applied to a warrior.

² עֶלְלָם (the fem. of which, עֶלְלָמָה, occurs in the famous passage, *Isa.* vii. 14).

³ *1 Sam.* xx. 35 (נַעַר קָטָן); cf. *xxv.* 21, 36-41 (נַעַר). So Solomon calls himself 'a little boy' (*1 Kings* iii. 7). St. Chrysostom in his sketch of the combat with Goliath repeatedly calls David παιδίον μικρόν, and refers to his having been anointed by Samuel νέος ὢν καὶ μετράων κομιδῇ (*Hom. in Ps.* 1.).



because I am swarthy, because the sun hath scorched me,' but like the girl's lover, whose complexion is of mingled white and red.¹ David's exposure to the sun had not yet had time to tan his face. Now country lads in Palestine, especially those of the higher class, often keep fair and attractive features till about fourteen, but never longer. David was no doubt a well-born lad, and had not been constantly with the flocks, but his shepherd life would in the end have changed his looks, and there is no suggestion in the narrative that there was anything supernatural in his beauty. Soon afterwards, it is true, he does appear in the new character of a warrior (1 Sam. xviii. 13); but this only shows how carefully the narrator has abstained from spoiling a beautiful story, which in his hands has become the most telling of sermons, out of regard for mere consistency. David, then, was a boy of at most fourteen,² and Saul would have had a right

¹ See Song i. 5, v. 10, and cf. note ¹, p. 102.

² 'Fair-faced was the boy, twelve years old, well-grown, and of an excellent spirit; he herded the kids and lambs of his "uncle's" household' (Doughty, *A.D.*, i. 470), is a description which might almost be applied to David. Among other objections which have been urged against the above explanation, I find this. 'David must have been much older than fourteen years, because Saul who was "higher than any of the people" put his helmet and coat of mail upon David, and David also girded on Saul's sword. Imagine one of our drummer-boys dressed up in the helmet, cuirass, &c. of one of our Life Guardsmen.' But popular tales are not to be interpreted too realistically, especially when they have been touched by a moralist. From a realistic point of view, it was no doubt a mistake to insert the detail referred to. Even a tall

to express surprise at the seeming absurdity of his proposal. Why, it was comparatively not so long ago that, when that great judge and hero Gideon bade his firstborn son fall upon the two captive kings of Midian and slay them, he was afraid, 'because he was yet a youth.'¹ How then should this shepherd-boy, untrained in the use of arms, venture to meet a giant in single combat?

Saul, I say, might have urged these objections. How is it that he does not do so, and that the opposition which he offers to David is so feeble? The reason is simply this—that David had an innate faculty of charming. Orientals fully recognize the existence of such a faculty, and ascribe the possession of it to a special divine gift. Joseph, another darling of popular tradition, is reported to have had it, but hardly, according to the story, in as high a degree as David. This noble boy had in fact all God's best gifts. He was somewhat tall, even if shorter than Eliab,² for he could at any rate put on Saul's armour; he was strong, as he will presently tell us himself; and he had, as the narrator informs us, a ruddy com-

lad would not have been likely to put on Saul's armour. But the Israelitish readers were not as critical as we are, and the narrator, as we shall see, had a quasi-allegorical object in making the young David put on Saul's armour.

¹ Judg. viii. 20, Sept., ὅτι νεώτερος ἦν (722).

² 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

plexion and beautiful eyes.¹ But his most enviable gift (which again and again helped him in his career) was one of manner and of speech.

We heard his 'soft answer' to an angry brother; we shall presently listen to him as with loyal respect he answers the king by a sketch of his repeated adventures with wild beasts. Shepherds in those days were not like those of our pastoral plays, nor, as in our Lord's time, was the wolf the most dangerous animal whom the guardians of the flocks

¹ Both in 1 Sam. xvi. 12 and in xvii. 42 David is called *'admóni* (like Esau-Edom in Gen. xxv. 28), i.e. reddish. This epithet is not derived from a solar myth (see p. 80), but expresses a well-remembered traditional feature of our hero. It refers, not to the colour of David's hair—for this was dark (a goat's hair net represents his hair in Michal's stratagem, 1 Sam. xix. 13), but to that of his skin. Whatever the exact hue was, it marked David out to Goliath as a boy, and as we may judge from Lam. iv. 7, Song v. 10, as a beautiful boy. These two passages deserve to be quoted as illustrations,

The nobles were purer than snow, whiter than milk,
They were more ruddy in body than corals . . .
My beloved is dazzlingly white and ruddy,
Distinguished above ten thousand :

.
His locks are curling, black as the raven.

Josephus (*Ant.* vi. 8, 1) paraphrases 1 Sam. xvi. 12, not very happily, *ξανθὸς μὲν τὴν χροάν, γοργὸς δὲ τὰς ὀψεις*, 'tawny of complexion and fierce of eye.' Sept. renders, *πυρράκης μετὰ κάλλους ὀφθαλμῶν* (so here and in xvii. 42). Bright eyes were much admired in a country in which bad sight was so common (see the Gospels). The reader will find a different view of David's physiognomy in Sayce's *The Races of the Old Testament*, p. 74. I should have thought that if David had any (recent) foreign blood, it was not Amoritish but Moabitish, and therefore not strictly alien.

might have to face.¹ Bears and lions still prowled about the forests and mountain-glens, nor did they even hold themselves aloof from more frequented paths. If a man fled from a lion, a bear might meet him,² and close to an important place like Bethel she-bears might rend young children.³ Well might the mere hireling, who was no true shepherd, flee at the sight of one of these marauders! But could we expect more from the youngest son of Jesse the Bethlehemite? True, it could not be said of David that he 'cared not for the sheep'; he loved them doubtless for his father's sake. But he was a mere boy in years, and the shepherd-prophet Amos speaks of a shepherd as rescuing out of a lion's mouth only 'two legs and a piece of an ear'⁴ (of a sheep), while Isaiah goes so far as to say that a multitude of shepherds shouting together will not make a young lion give up his prey.⁵ In our own day none but the stoutest and best-armed hunter will venture to attack the Syrian bear alone.⁶ How then should the boy David do the like?⁷ How, except by the Spirit of Jehovah, which 'came mightily' upon him, as it

¹ John x. 12.² Am. v. 19.³ 2 Kings ii. 24.⁴ Am. iii. 12.⁵ Isa. xxxi. 4.⁶ Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, p. 573. Mr. Doughty hunted bears at Helbon (*Arabia Deserta*, ii. 152).⁷ In a remarkable narrative in Kosegarten's *Arabic Chrestomathy*, the Turkish slave who is crucified is said to have slain a lion in his youth. But the tale seems to be legendary.

did upon the young man Samson, when he 'rent a young lion as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand'?¹ David however is too modest to tell us this; and he is perhaps but half conscious of the fact. These are his thoroughly natural, soul-stirring words,

*Thy servant kept his father's sheep; and when a lion came, or a bear, and took a sheep out of the flock, I would go after him and smite him, and deliver it out of his mouth: and when he rose up against me, I would seize hold of his beard, and smite him and slay him.*² Thy servant hath slain both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.³ One word more the brave shepherd-boy added, *Jehovah that delivered me out of the paw of*

¹ Judg. xiv. 6. It is noteworthy that, just as one of David's mighty men is described in the roll of heroes as slaying Goliath, so another appears in the same document as going down into a pit and slaying a lion under difficult circumstances (2 Sam. xxiii. 20).

² See Driver, *Text of Samuel*, p. 112. Sept. has an excellent rendering, in which the repetition of the acts is marked by imperfects; aorists follow

³ The occurrence of the phrase 'the living Elohim' (אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים) here (v. 36) and in v. 26 (where it is supported by Sept.) is remarkable. Elsewhere it only occurs in Deut. v. 23, Jer. x. 10 (post-Jeremian), xxiii. 36, and in a slightly different form (אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים) in 2 Kings ix. 4, 16 (with 'to defy,' לְתַרְרָה). In Ps. xlii. 3, lxxxiv. 3 we have אֱלֹהֵי חַיִּים. The occurrence of the phrase in v. 26, 36 may perhaps be due to the hand of the editor. In David's mouth, at any rate, it is an anachronism. The heathen idol-gods were not yet to the Israelites 'dead (gods)' (Ps. cvi. 28).

the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And now Saul's faint resistance gives way. He thoroughly enters into David's spirit of faith, and couples his consent with a benediction—'Go, and Jehovah be with thee.'

Still the idea of David's meeting the Philistine with his shepherd's gear shocked the king. Strange enough this may seem, after David's speech, but there was a reason for the introduction of this incident which will appear later. So Saul equipped the tall lad in his own armour, and David made no objection, but dutifully tried it. He found, however, as was to be expected, that it greatly hampered his movements, and after walking in it once or twice backward and forward,¹ he took it off again. Meantime Goliath had retired to a little distance. At first he and his party supposed that the challenge had been refused. But an unwonted commotion among the Israelites soon warned them that a champion was preparing for the field. David on his side knew that no time was to be lost. His plan was already formed. He had

¹ Read, with Sept., 'and wearied himself, walking once or twice backward and forward.' Klostermann boldly does away with Saul's armour or military dress, and substitutes Jonathan's (reading *בְּזֵי יִנְתָּן*). Incidentally this removes a grammatical difficulty (see Driver, *Tenses*), § 133). In 1 Sam. xviii. 1-4 (still SS.) Jonathan gives his adopted brother his own 'dress' and armour.

with him the ordinary weapons of a shepherd—a staff and a sling.¹ Now he well knew that the sling had often proved effective enough in Israelitish warfare,² and may even have dreamed of serving as a slinger in the army. If he could only aim at Goliath from the right distance, the chances (if we may use the word) were all in his favour. But before confronting his foe, he must replenish his friendly ‘scrip’ with some good smooth pebbles, and for these he must descend into that deep water-course which like a ravine separates the armies. Five such pebbles he selects—there are hundreds of them,—and then returns to meet the Philistine. The main bodies of the two armies have meantime moved forward to view the combat, the Israelites drawn up on the green slope of their hill, so as to fall back if necessary on their intrenchment, the Philistines with their dreaded war-chariots and a part of their

¹ The shepherd’s staff was properly a club-stick (Arabic *nabîl*) such as Bedouins still use as a weapon in Hejâz (Doughty, *A.D.*, i. 147, 379). The ‘staves’ mentioned in Matt. xxvi. 47 are also evidently weapons, so that Milton is quite right when he makes the blind Samson say to the Philistine giant Harapha (who is the duplicate of Goliath), ‘I only with an oaken staff will meet thee.’ The sling is still used both in Syria and in Arabia. ‘Children of the menzils came down upon me,’ says Mr. Doughty, ‘armed as it were against some savage beast’ [there are no lions or bears in Arabia], ‘with slings in their hands’ (*A.D.*, i. 147).

² The ancient Israelites fought with slings (Judg. xx. 16, 2 Kings iii. 25); so did the ancient Arabians (*A.D.*, ii. 176).

infantry below in the valley, prepared to charge the Israelites on the overthrow of Goliath's antagonist.

Can you not now imagine the scene, and even read the faces both of spectators and of combatants? The Philistines are the most excited of the former; they look upon the approaching transaction as a sport, or perhaps as a religious ceremony, David being about to feel the wrath of the gods of Philistia. Amid deep silence only broken by chanted curses of the Philistines, their champion Goliath advances, proudly secure. As he moves, he looks about for his destined opponent. Where is the Israelitish slave who presumes to meet a son of Anak? He sees a boy, beautiful as a girl, of a slight though elastic frame, with a staff in his hand; the sling, however, Goliath does not notice. Angrily he exclaims, '*Am I a dog that thou comest against me with staves?*'¹ *And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.* Futile curses! wasted anger! The pulses of the Hebrew boy beat as evenly as before; his keenly vigilant eyes beam with the same lustre. So Goliath makes one more effort to intimidate David. In words that remind us of passages in the heroic

¹ 'Am I a dog'—a miserable street-dog, or may-be one of the dogs of a strange enclosure, such as Odysseus met with (*Od.* xiv. 28), and such as Mr. Doughty describes as worrying strange comers, but kept off by a camel-stick (*A.D.*, i. 338).

lays of Greece¹ he cries, *Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the field.* Calmly David replies, *'Thou comest to me with sword, and spear, and javelin; but I come to thee in the name of Jehovah Sabdôth, the God of the armies² of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will Jehovah deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee and take thine head from off thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day to the fowls of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that Israel hath indeed a God.'*³ And now for the winding-up of the drama; the combat begins. It was a longer one than we sometimes imagine. For v. 48 should be rendered thus, *And it used to happen, when the Philistine arose⁴ and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David would haste and run to the battle array to meet the Philistine,* i.e. whenever Goliath tried to come to close quarters with David, David would run quickly towards the front rank of Israel to meet his

¹ See Hom. *Il.* xiii. 829-832. Bishop Warburton would have objected to this that 'Homer's poems are no religious history, but a military and civil romance, brimful of fabulous trumpery' (*Works*, by Hurd, v. 285). I trust that religious readers in our day will not be so unjust to 'Homer' and so blind to the real parallels between his poems and the traditions of Israel.

² Properly 'the ordered ranks.' ³ On this verse see below.

⁴ 'Arose' simply means 'shewed himself in full strength as a foe'; cf. Ps. iii. 1, liv. 4, &c.

enemy under this friendly cover.¹ He had in fact but two advantages over Goliath—his lightness of foot and his sureness of aim: if he did not use these, he was to all appearance a lost man. At last his opportunity came. Goliath exposed his face unduly. He ought to have kept it well-covered with the great shield which was borne before him² (v. 7). But he disdained the toy-weapons, as he thought them, of the shepherd-boy. And now see the use of all that practice with the sling on the lonely hill-side. ‘*And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead; and the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell upon his face to the earth.*’ ‘With a shout he fell,’ as the prince of Greek poets says, ‘and his armour clanked upon him.’³ But though stunned and mortally wounded, he was not dead; so David drew Goliath’s great sword from its sheath, and cut off his head.⁴ Then the Philistines saw that the

¹ See Klostermann’s note.

² Helmets in those early days seem to have had no vizors.

³ Hom. *Il.* v. 42 (Purves’s version).

⁴ The reputed sword of Goliath was shown in after-times, as is clear from the popular tradition preserved in 1 Sam. xxi. 9, cf. xxii. 10 (SS.). Was it genuine, or not? We cannot tell. Forged relics cast a shadow on true ones. Few would stand for Lancelot’s sword, shown in the time of William Caxton (preface to *Morte Darthur*). But remembering what is said by an earlier writer than SS. of Saul’s armour (1 Sam. xxxi. 10, see analysis, p. 6), one is inclined to hope that David’s sword was a genuine trophy. Note that 1 Sam. xvii. 5-7 makes no mention of a sword.

incredible had happened, and took to flight. Why did they flee? Had they not still their well-appointed infantry and their war-chariots?¹ Had they not still the memory of their former victories? A Greek poet would have said that a god impelled them behind with mighty hand, and struck terror into their souls; and indeed it was a religious dread which seized them. They were powerless to resist the fierce Israelites. Let us draw a veil over the terrible scenes which must have followed.

So ends this prose-poem—more striking in its unadorned simplicity than many a more elaborate work. Our great composer Handel, who knew his Bible so well, felt its beauty, and in his own suggestive way translated the battle-scene into exquisite music.² We enjoy the music; and why should we not enjoy the simple but in its way exquisite word-painting on which the music is based? One is tempted sometimes to think that the music of our anthems and oratorios is more heavenly than the words. We ought at any rate to be stirred up by the beauty of the music to seek for real though as yet unsuspected beauties in the words. What Handel divined rather than consciously realized, I have endeavoured to exhibit clearly before you. Your own imagination

¹ In his first oratorio 'Saul.'

² Cf. Miller, *The Least of all Lands*, p. 140.

must do the rest. Let us thank God for having given us in the Old Testament a few flowers of the popular imagination which are poetically only less delightful than the glorious Homeric poems. From the point of view of spiritual truths, there can of course be no question which productions are the greatest. The prose-poems which we find sometimes in the Old Testament have the inestimable advantage of being free from those tangled growths of misunderstood mythology which make the Iliad more interesting perhaps but less edifying. Of course, the story of David and Goliath is too short to give very much help in religious training, but what it does give is of great price. It may not, for the reasons which I have given, be historically true that David killed Goliath, or even that as a shepherd-boy he killed wild beasts single-handed, not once nor twice. But the truth which is the germ of gospel truth, that 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble,' and that all true success is really a deliverance wrought out by God our Saviour, could not have been so forcibly expressed without its romantic setting. Beautiful are the words of the psalmist, *Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the serpent shalt thou trample under feet.*¹ But do they impress us half as much as the story of Daniel in the lions' den or of

¹ Ps. xci. 13.

David in the open country smiting and slaying lions and bears? Sweet too is that saying of another psalmist, *Jehovah, who is like unto thee, who deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him?*¹ But does this generalization appeal to us half as much as the concrete instance of the shepherd-boy prevailing over the mail-clad giant? It may not indeed be historically true, but it is none the less real; first, because the traditional story which the prose-poet took up impresses itself on our minds with as much force as the finest of Shakespeare's tragedies, and secondly, because the truth which it embodies has been realized day by day for thousands of years, and will be realized till time shall be no more. The story of David and Goliath is only untrue if this or the like of this is impossible to the 'living God,' by whom are all things, and 'in whom all things consist'; only if those wonderful words of our Lord are illusory, *If ye have faith and doubt not, ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and it shall come to pass.*²

For there are two kinds of faith—the faith which doubts and can only follow a human leader, and that which initiates bold plans and can move mountains. Saul is the impersonation of the one; David of the other. How disappointing is the conduct of the

¹ Ps. xxxv. 10.

² Matt. xxi. 21.

former!¹ If he had not faith enough to go out against Goliath himself, he might at least have sent Jonathan, who had the spirit of a knight-errant, and knew full well that there was 'no restraint to Jehovah, to save by many or by few.'² For doubtless Jonathan, being a Benjamite, was a good marksman, and with the courage of faith could have laid low the giant. All that one can say in excuse for Saul is that he may have destined Jonathan to succeed him, and therefore have sought to hold him in, and we may fairly praise Saul for being so easily persuaded to accept David as a champion. David, however, is morally a complete contrast to Saul; his was that highest kind of faith, which is *the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen*.³ He may not indeed have had more of it than his 'blameless friend Jonathan, whom Judas the Maccabee generously couples with him as a type of the saviours of Israel;'⁴ but he was more severely tested. And nobly did David stand the trial. Does our prose-poet idealize him? Yes; he looks at his darling hero with the same large-hearted charity with which God, as we believe, regards each of his striving children. No shepherd-boy performs such feats as the David of

¹ Dr. W. Miller attempts to defend Saul (*The Least of all Lands*, pp. 138-140), but on doubtful grounds.

² 1 Sam. xiv. 6.

³ Heb. xi. 1.

⁴ 1 Macc. iv. 30.

the story, or sings such holy songs as the 23rd psalm. And yet the idealism is not entirely divorced from fact. The historical David fought his Goliaths and sang his songs at a somewhat later date ; for who will say either that David was not a sweet poet, or that the deeds which he actually wrought, so far as they were for Jehovah and for Israel, were less wonderful than killing the lions and the bears and the giant ?

Yes ; David, alike as persecuted outlaw and as king, was a hero of faith, though his faith was so undeveloped, and entangled with so many illusions, that not to see it is perhaps pardonable. The narrator at any rate saw it. How different is the royal-hearted boy who conquered Goliath even from the hero whose story most nearly resembles his—Cyrus, king of Persia !¹ The narrator has no sense of any incongruity between the early life of David and his subsequent career. Whether among the sheepfolds or on the throne he was where God had placed him, and with regard to sheep and to people it could with equal truth be said of David that—

*He fed them with a faithful and true heart,
And ruled them prudently with all his power.*

Not without a purpose, then, does our prose-poet tell us that David rose up early, and left the sheep with a

¹ Herod. i. 111-114. Cf. the Babylonian legend of Sargon, gardener and king (Sayce, *Hibbert Lects.*, pp. 26-28).

keeper, and went as Jesse had commanded him. His father's command is to David the voice of God, and when called to act upon his own responsibility he will still listen for a higher voice telling him what to do. His faith is rewarded. In difficult circumstances, when all around are perplexed, he has a singular clearness of vision, and offers himself as a champion, not because he is great, but because he is in himself little. Saul's advice confuses him for a moment, but his own illuminated sagacity leads him right. He puts off Saul's armour—suitable for his king, but not for him; Jehovah's champion must be genuine and true. Thus in the most delicate manner the narrator suggests to his countrypeople the impropriety of vying with foreign nations in earthly means of defence. Like a true disciple of the prophets, he feels very strongly on this point, and those noble words which he has put into David's mouth, *Thou comest to me with sword, and spear, and javelin: but I come to thee in the name of Jehovah Sabáoth, the God of the armies of Israel* (v. 45), are the expression of one of his own deepest convictions. The simplicity of David's weapon is in fact symbolical in the highest degree; the sling and the stone symbolize Israel's poverty and consequent dependence on divine help—they are also the symbols and pledges of Israel's victory.

In preaching this doctrine our prose-poet becomes the forerunner of the temple-poets. Thus in Ps. xliv. 6, 8 we read—

*For not in my bow do I trust,
Neither can my sword save me.
We make our boast of God all day long,
And praise thy name for ever.*

And in Ps. xxxiii. 16, 20,—

*A king is not saved by a vast army,
Nor a warrior rescued by great power.
Our soul waiteth for Jchovah ;
He is our help and our shield.*

But it is also most interesting to observe that two later writers have as it were appended their testimony to the soundness of the original narrator's teaching. You remember that I ventured to point out that though the Greek version, which is so strongly sanctioned in the New Testament, has omitted far too many verses, some verses and parts of verses must be omitted in the interests of the narrative itself, and I referred to verses 12–16 as needing the hand of a skilful restorer. I must now add that verses 46 and 47 are beyond reasonable doubt later additions. One later writer has given us *v.* 46, in which the slaughter not only of Goliath but of the Philistines by David is confidently predicted, and as a result the universal recognition of the wondrous power of the God of

Israel.¹ This reminds us of Ps. xviii. 47-49, which contains similar exalted views, and with the rest of the psalm belongs at earliest to the last century of Jewish independence, and also of those remarkable words of Jehovah in the Second Isaiah,² *Behold, I appointed him a witness to the peoples*, where David is represented idealistically as making Jehovah known to foreign nations, like a missionary teacher—a touching proof of the ever-growing veneration of the Jews for the greatest of their kings.³ To a second later writer we are indebted for v. 47, in which the warriors of Israel are spoken of, in the manner of the Books of Chronicles,⁴ just as if they were an ‘assembly’ gathered

¹ Bishop Patrick comments thus on v. 46, ‘David did not rashly and vainly boast beforehand of the victory as Goliath had done.’ But the words assigned to David there do come very near to a boast, and the language is even modelled in part on that of Goliath. The first clause indeed might conceivably be the work of the original narrator; it is modestly expressed, and contains the verbal form *sigger*, which occurs again thrice in Samuel, and nowhere else. The second clause ascribes to David what belongs properly first of all to Jehovah and next (if a man be mentioned at all) to Saul; the Sept. slightly softens this by inserting ‘thy carcase and.’ It also contains the phrase ‘(wild) beast of the earth,’ which occurs elsewhere only in probably late writings (Gen. i. 24, 25, 30, ix. 2, 10; Ezek. xxix. 5, xxxii. 4, xxxiv. 28; Job v. 22; Ps. lxxix. 2). Notice in passing the striking parallelism between the whole of clause 2 and Ps. lxxix. 2.

² Isa. lv. 4.

³ So the author of Hezekiah’s prayer makes that king express the more fully developed view and with it the strong missionary spirit of a later age (Isa. xxxviii. 15-19; note the closing words). Comp. also the words given to Joshua in Josh. iv. 24.

⁴ See 2 Chron. xx. 14-20, where the same word *qāhāl* ‘assembly’ occurs, evidently in a liturgical sense. In 1 Sam. xvii. 46 *qāhāl* might

together for religious instruction, the instruction in this case being that the twofold salvation of Israel was entirely due to Jehovah. Can any one be surprised at this? The old records of Israel had to be edited and re-edited like our own older religious books, to adapt them to the wants of later times. Other writers had tried by insertions to clear up the narrative; it was not unnatural that this one should seek to strengthen what I may venture to call the homiletical application. The Goliath-story must indeed have appealed very strongly to the later Israelites, for they too like those for whom Saul fought were a poor and oppressed people, and when they read that Goliath was slain by his own sword (v. 51), they thought of the oppressors of their own time (whether Babylonians or Persians), and sang—

Their sword shall enter their own heart,

And their bows shall be broken.

His mischief recoils on his own head,

And his violence descends on his own skull.

(Ps. xxxvii. 15 ; vii. 16.)

Far be it from me to give the highest praise to any faith but that commended in the Gospel. What an immense value God must set upon this faith that it took so many centuries—nay, so many thousands of years—for Him to make its nature plain to a section of

no doubt be used in a military sense, if spoken (somewhat contemptuously) by a Philistine; cf. Num. xxii. 4, and the 15 passages in Ezekiel in which the word is used of armies of heathen nations.

mankind ! The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews did good service by emphasizing in the 11th chapter the similarity of true faith in all ages ; but, in accordance with his own words (Heb. i. 1), it is equally justifiable to point out the imperfections of primitive faith. Those devout psalmists of whom I spoke had true faith,—that is, they from the heart obeyed the commands and counted on the promises of God, and to prove their fidelity to both they were ready to suffer worldly loss and to die. But this faith was mixed up with intellectual illusions ; they looked forward, for instance, to a great material reward for their nation and a great material punishment for their enemies. Now this is altogether opposed to the spirit and tendency of the Gospel. Whatever concessions our Lord, as a wise teacher, may provisionally make to popular ideas, the hope which He sets before men is a spiritual hope, and the fear which He sets before them is a spiritual fear. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Cast ye the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* And the highest work that He can give His disciples to do is to ‘preach the Gospel to every creature,’¹ most certainly not excluding the enemies of one’s country.

¹ Mark xvi. 15. Though these words are not genuine, we cannot doubt that they represent Christ’s true meaning (cf. Isa. xlii. 1).

The illusion referred to, which beset even inspired men, deserves our tenderest pity. It involved those who were subject to it in much mental agony, and it kept back Jewish faith from the great things which, ideally, faith ought to effect. It seems, moreover, to have been strengthened in some degree by the influence of an ideal based on the life of David. Not with impunity did Israel solace itself with the fascinating story of its hero. Even the tale of David and Goliath could not neutralize the effect of less idealistic traditions. Nor is it itself a thoroughly adequate symbol of truth. The David of the story does no doubt symbolize humble dependence upon God, but the deliverance granted to him is an earthly one and it is the first in a long series of earthly triumphs. But the triumphs for which God means us to ask in faith are primarily spiritual ones, and only in so far earthly as is necessary for helping forward the great purposes of the divine King.

The 8th psalm is among the most evangelical psalms in the Psalter. The parallel between the second verse of it and the speech of David to Goliath cannot therefore be complete. David is humble towards God and towards his fellow-Israelites, but he is not at all humble towards the Philistine. There is no regretfulness in his tone, no charitable longing to bring Goliath to a better mind. This was the

attitude, more or less certainly, even of some of the psalmists; it was not that of the author of the 8th psalm, nor of the authors of other psalms which we shall presently study. Thus, there is a real difference between the faith of the two types of men. A faith which is not interfused with universal love and self-forgetting humility is not the faith which is acceptable to Him 'whose nature and whose name is Love,' and whose divine Son 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.'

Still we are so thankful for what the beautiful story of David and Goliath can give that we gladly pass over its imperfections. With the exception of Samuel, David is the only personage in the Old Testament narratives called to a great work in extreme youth, and in the utter simplicity of faith hearkening to the call. Contrast even Jeremiah. The call reached him to become a prophet to the nations; how does he respond to it? 'Ah! Lord Jehovah,' he said, 'surely I cannot speak, for I am but a child.'¹ His sensitive nature shrank from the arduous task till a further divine impulse made it harder to refuse than to accept.² But the inner voice of God at once spoke so clearly to David that he could not choose but

¹ Jer. i. 6; 'child' = יָלֵד, Sept. νεώτερος.

² May I refer to my study of this autobiographical record in *Jeremiah: his Life and Times* (Nisbet, 1888), p. 4?

follow it. And much as we may sympathize with Jeremiah, whose character is almost modern in its complexity, we must admit that the ideal set before us in David is the highest. Oh, may the young among us open their ears, like David, to the voice of God, especially when it speaks in unaccustomed accents! There ought to be a few in every community to whom God sends a special message, a few on whom the Spirit of God desires to come mightily, as he came upon David—desires to come, I say, for the Spirit of God forces no one. Some young, candid, unselfish natures there must be everywhere; let such wait upon God for any special view of duty which it may be His will to give. It will come quite naturally; it is a part of the necessary moral preparation for a call that we should be simple and genuine.

There is yet one other point of great importance in which we should all wish to follow David. It may be difficult in this age of great material triumphs always to remember it; but it is a fact. The hidden forces which move the world being moral and spiritual ones, true success in life depends on our placing ourselves in relation to these forces, the centre of which we call God. Even Jesus Christ in His divine humanity constantly looked up to His Father for strength to work; how much more must we be ever looking to the great Strengtheners! Like David, we must put

off all fancied superiorities ; Saul's armour will be as useless as Goliath's in the day of battle. The sling and the stone must content us, but not David's ; for it is a dream to suppose with Rousseau that the simplicity of pastoral manners is morally better than a more artificial life. Do you ask what the sling of the Christian is ? It is the mind renewed in the image of Christ which like the sun-flower turns constantly to the sun. And his stones from the brook are partly those short, strong, dart-like prayers, fitly called ejaculations, partly those passages of Scripture which in time of need the Spirit of God blesses to his edification. As one of our latest religious poets sings,—

So with one promise from the sacred pages
The streams whereof make glad the Church below—
One text worn smooth by use of rolling ages,
Our soul's strong enemy we overthrow.¹

But is the parallel between the combat of the Christian and the combat of David complete enough to be worth urging ? Does not the Christian's enemy constantly return to the assault ? ' Give peace in our time,'—these words are day by day darted up by the Church ; but, as the sceptic may ask, with what result ? When was the time and where was the place when the Church, or any living member of it, was free from

¹ Rev. Richard Wilton.

enemies? Our Church therefore supplies us with an interpretation of her 'give peace.' In a fuller prayer for peace she bids us ask, 'Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies, that we surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries.' *There* is true peace. Enemies there will always be—the most dangerous enemies of all, those of the soul. The forces in society which make against the spiritual life are numerous and powerful. But there is a way, as the psalmist tells us, 'to still the enemy and the avenger'—not to extinguish him, but to still the fury of his assault. In describing it, the psalmist uses a strange but expressive figure. The prayers and praises of believers form, he says, a tower of strength, in which God and His people dwell together, and against which no enemy can prevail:—*with the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast established a stronghold.* May this stronghold be ours! Then shall we fear no Goliaths:—

*Our bars shall be iron and brass,
And as our days, so shall our rest be.*¹

¹ Deut. xxxiii. 25

NOTE ON THE 'INSPIRATION' OF 2 SAM. xxi. 19.

It is the privilege of devout criticism to show that many of those early Hebrew narratives, which some would degrade to the rank of mere myths or legends, possess a unique spiritual quality which may be called 'inspiration.' Among these there is no difficulty in placing the lovely story of David and Goliath, which is not a mere folk-tale, but also an allegory, though not nearly as perfect a one as the Fathers of the Church laboured to show that it was. Divine must have been the gifts of the writer who converted a traditional story, such as those which still delight the sons of the Arabian desert, into so exquisite a vehicle of elementary but most precious spiritual truths. But what shall we say of the second or rival account of the slaying of Goliath, found in 2 Sam. xxi. 19 (Revised Version),— 'And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob; and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite slew Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam'? And what of the little document to which this passage belongs (it includes 2 Sam. xxi. 15-22, and xxiii. 8-39), which appears to be an incomplete extract from a very ancient Israelite 'roll of honour'? Is there anything here which suggests the overruling influence of that

Holy Spirit who prefers for His temple the lowly and contrite heart? Not to a careless observer. But if we look at this passage in the light of its new setting, we may form a higher estimate of its value. As it stands, it may seem only to enforce what we may call the natural virtue of courage, but placed as it is in the midst of poetry and narrative of a much more elevated character, it becomes penetrated with a higher meaning. And then, if we look a little closer, we shall recognize that devout Israelites regarded even what we may think the lower virtues as supernatural graces:—the Spirit of Jehovah manifested Himself, as they believed, in all human excellences, and especially in that resolute courage which can face the greatest odds, and resist the enemy ‘till the hand cleaves to the sword.’ The somewhat fierce heroism of David and his mighty men forms a necessary balance to the meek and gentle spirit of other portions of Scripture. Our Bible would not be so frankly natural as it is without it, and so Elhanan may take his place as the slayer of Goliath among the founders of the Church-nation of Israel, though far indeed behind prophets like Jeremiah and poets like the author of the 23rd psalm.

PART II.

THE BOOK OF PSALMS.

CHAPTER I.

THE CRITICAL STUDY OF THE PSALTER.

THE Book of Psalms may be called a second Pentateuch ; in the Hebrew Bible it is divided into five books (I. Ps. i.-xli. ; II. Ps. xlii.-lxxii. ; III. Ps. lxxiii.-lxxxix. ; IV. Ps. xc.-cvi. ; V. Ps. cvii.-cl.). Or, more strictly, it is a Tetrateuch (a combination of four books), since Books IV. and V. evidently once formed a single book or minor Psalter. Now, each of these books forms a group, and within each of them, either by the psalm-headings, or (more or less probably) by internal evidence smaller groups can be made out. Let the reader therefore give his chief attention to these groups, for, unless we find reason to analyze a larger group into several smaller ones, we may presume that the psalms which compose each group belong to the same (not too narrowly defined) historical period. In Books IV. and V. (which

should be studied first) the following groups can be traced, (*a*) Ps. xciii., xcv.-c., called the 'accession' psalms (because they relate to the visible 'accession' of Jehovah as king after the Return), (*b*) Ps. cxiii.-cxviii. (the Hallel psalms), (*c*) Ps. cxx.-cxxxiv. (the 'songs of ascent,' or, 'of pilgrimage'), (*d*) Ps. cxlvi.-cl. (last Hallelujah psalms). In Books II. and III. the most evident groups are the 'psalms of the sons of Korah' and those 'of Asaph'; in Books I. and II. the psalms 'of David' (the 'Davidic' psalms in the other books should be considered separately). The student may also, if he will, class together the psalms which betray the religious and literary influence of certain Old Testament books, the date of which he has already determined (Jeremiah, the Second Isaiah, Job). This however must be done cautiously, and under skilled direction.

Have we the psalms in their original form? Of the pre-Exilic psalms (if we have any) this cannot of course be said. The tone and character of post-Exilic was in many points different from that of pre-Exilic religion, and the Church-nation, of which Jeremiah was the founder and Ezra the organizer, could not have been satisfied with what we may call pre-Reformation hymns. Moreover, the Exile evidently brought into existence new ideas respecting liturgical music and singing. There may at any rate at the

close of the regal period, have been some trained singers in the temple (Neh. vii. 44—Ezra ii. 41, but cf. 2 Sam. vi. 5, 1 Kings i. 40, Am. v. 21–23, Isa. xxx. 29¹), but upon the whole the singing in the pre-Exilic period was in a peculiar sense congregational, and its effect could be likened (by a poet of the Exile) to that of the confused noise of the Chaldæan soldiery in the temple (Lam. ii. 7). When the singing was so rough, so primitive,² the psalms cannot have been very polished in style; but the extant psalms display a considerable sense of art. The only temple-songs, or fragments of (presumed) temple-songs, of probable pre-Exilic origin, which have come down to us, are a passage from a hymn by Solomon in 1 Kings viii. (see *B.L.*, pp. 193, 212), and a thanksgiving formula in Jer. xxxiii. 11, to which may possibly or even probably be added Ps. xviii. (see *B.L.*, pp. 204–207). It is also possible or even probable that fragments of pre-Exilic psalms have been worked up into later compositions, just as a fragment of the Song of Deborah was worked up into Ps. lxviii. The psalms which speak of a king might plausibly be regarded as containing such early psalm-fragments,³ though as they stand they are obviously not older than other psalms;

¹ These passages show that at any rate the principal part of the singing was taken by the congregation.

² Comp. Mrs. Oliphant, *Jerusalem*, p. 183. ³ See however *B.L.*

but it is impossible to apply a critical analysis to them. Probably the only passage which can plausibly be separated from the context of a psalm, and described as perhaps pre-Exilic, is Ps. lx. 6-10a, and even here the separation is not as easy as we could wish. Ps. xxiv. 7-10 is a processional hymn in the post-Exilic manner, while Ps. lxxxix., the only psalm which Cornill ventures to mark as possibly pre-Exilic, is rather, as I have shown (*B.L.*, pp. 116-118, 128, 129), a work of the Persian age.

There are in fact only two views which can with much plausibility be defended. One is that which I held myself in 1888 (see my commentary). It is that the composition of temple-songs like those in our Psalter began in the reforming age of Josiah and Jeremiah. To this period not a few psalms might plausibly be referred (especially those which betray the influence of Jeremiah), while nearly all the psalms which should, as I now believe, be referred to the early Greek or Maccabæan period, might conceivably be placed in the Persian age. A closer investigation of the history of the Jews will most probably soon render this theory unacceptable, but it will be provisionally useful to many. The other view is that which I have set forth in my *Bampton Lectures for 1889*. It takes account of all the circumstances of the case, and fully admits

the possible elements of truth in rival theories. It also enables those Christian apologists, who do not scout the doctrine of historical development as irreligious, to present a more reasonable view of the progress of revelation than has hitherto been current. Take Ps. xvi. for instance. If this be pre-Exilic, nay even if it be an early post-Exilic work, it is impossible to find in it anticipations worth mentioning of Christianity. But if it falls within the latter part of the Persian period the case becomes far otherwise. Both in this psalm, and in Ps. xvii., xxxvi., xlix., lxiii., lxxiii., there are passages which may, without straining language, be taken to give a vague, untheological expression to the hope of immortality, on condition that they can be shown to have been written when Jewish believers were engaged in developing the germs of this hope in their own religion under the stimulus of the much more fully developed Zoroastrian beliefs.¹

But what of the tradition assigning many of the psalms to David? It sprang up under the influence of that idealization of the poet-king to which I have already referred, and what it asserts is unthinkable.²

¹ On this debateable point I venture to refer to the *Nineteenth Century*, Dec. 1891 (art. 'Ancient Beliefs in Immortality').

² That David may have written psalms, is of course not denied; only that such psalms as he wrote can have been like our psalms. Cf. Driver, *Introd.*, pp. 353-358, and my *B.L.*, pp. 190-195, 208-213.

A last desperate effort to rescue it has been made by the eminent Zend scholar, M. de Harlez, but it is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the theory (see his art. 'On the Age of the Psalms,' *Dublin Review*, July, 1889). Some of the Greek fathers, indeed, though they swallowed the Davidic origin of the *whole Book of Psalms*, were yet enabled by their theory of inspiration to neutralize the effect of this uncritical procedure. St. Chrysostom, for instance, says that David, in Psalm li., foresaw the falling away and captivity of the people of Israel, inasmuch as he 'was like a tragic poet,' and entered into the inmost thoughts of men of a distant age. The theory commended itself in some form to the beloved F. D. Maurice, but to most Western minds only creates a fresh stumbling-block for faith. Look at Shakespeare's bust at Stratford-on-Avon, and conceive, if you can, of its passing for that of a psalmist! The psalmists were no 'tragic poets,' but lived frankly and heartily in their own age, though it may well be that words which were suitable in one age of trouble recover much of their old meaning in another, and the editors of the Psalter may even have provided for this by omitting or modifying expressions which had too exclusively a contemporary reference. This last remark will account for the difficulty of proving to universal satisfaction the existence of a considerable number of Maccabæan

psalms. That there are at least a few, is for many reasons in the highest degree probable, and has been maintained again and again from the time of Theodore of Mopsuestia and his friends onwards. Nor has the Christian apologist any interest in rejecting this theory, for it furnishes an adequate explanation of some harsh passages which are not in the normal tone of the piety of the Psalter. But it requires a complicated argument, which beginners could not follow, to show that there are more than a very few Maccabæan psalms. I will here only reply to a remark of Prof. Kirkpatrick in his excellent though unduly cautious work on the Psalms (p. xxxvii.). The history of the Psalter and of the Canon cannot, in my opinion, be shown to exclude Maccabæan additions to the Book by a reference to the so-called Psalms of Solomon.¹ 'These psalms are indeed Pharisaean in tone. But exegesis reveals the germs of the better Pharisaism in some of the canonical psalms, and so softens the transition from the pre-Maccabæan to the later Maccabæan type of piety. That there is a wide difference between the two Psalters, I do not of course deny; but this has not the critical bearing which Prof. Kirkpatrick supposes. It is not chronological nearness which produces an affinity of tone

¹ On this Psalter (date, B.C. 63-48) see Ryle and James, *The Psalms of the Pharisees* (1891), and cf. my *B.L.*, pp. 15, 30, 33, 277, 411.

and thought (contrast Jeremiah and Ezekiel), but belonging to the same intellectual stage or period. The difference between the two Psalters is wide, but not absolute.¹ It is, moreover, not fair to take the Psalms of Solomon as representative of the Maccabæan period. For these interesting but artificial poems only just fall within that period, and were not completed till after its close. It would be better to argue thus,—‘If there were psalmists in the age of Pompey, when the stimulus given by Mattathias and his sons was waxing feeble, how should there not have been in the age of those heroes themselves’?² To Professor Kirkpatrick’s other arguments I have perhaps for the present sufficiently replied by anticipation elsewhere.

What more shall I add? First, an exhortation to the *historical study* of the psalms. ‘What is necessary to preserve for them the affections of Christendom is—a historical background. As mere academical exercises by not merely unnamed but unknown individuals, the psalms will neither greatly edify the Church nor charm the literary student. But if we can show that in losing David we have gained a succession of still sweeter psalmists, and that though we know not their names we partly know their history,

¹ ‘Zoroastrian influences,’ &c., art. by the present writer, *Expository Times*, Aug. 1891, p. 249.

² *B.L.*, p. 15.

and can follow them in their changing moods and experiences, we shall more than compensate the educated reader.' ¹ Next, a remark on the *personification of the people of Israel*. It can be shown that in most cases, even when the psalmist uses the first person singular, the speaker is either the Church or a typical pious Israelite. Having explained this theory elsewhere (see e.g., chapters on Ps. li.) I need not say much upon it now.² When fully realized, its strangeness will at once disappear, and it will relieve the student of the psalms from many embarrassments. For instance, there are many strong expressions which we can hardly understand in the mouth of any individual. It may be said of course that the psalmists prophesy of Christ; but this explanation seems contrary to sound psychology, and, as we have seen, the psalmists are not 'like tragic poets.' But when we understand that they are in general but the mouthpieces of the nation, it becomes evident that no expressions can be too strong. The Psalter will then remind us of that mystic eagle in Dante, composed of interwoven ruby-souls, which 'uttered with its voice both *I* and *My*, when in conception it was *We* and *Our*.'³ Next, on *Messianic psalms*. Edward Irving

¹ *B.L.*, p. 276.

² Cf. Driver, *Introd.*, pp. 366-367.

³ Dante, *Paradise*, xix. 11, 12 (*B.L.*, p. 265)

thus beautifully recasts a familiar saying of St. Augustine,¹ 'We cannot sing His praise or His triumph, but we must take ourselves in as a part, and be embraced in the very praises of our great Head. . . . At once are we constrained to worship the *objective* Saviour who is at the right hand of God, and the *subjective* Saviour who liveth with us, and is seated in the throne of our hearts.'² This is a legitimate development of the personification-theory. In the nation-psalms, it is sometimes the imperfect and erring Israel who speaks, sometimes that 'Israelite indeed,' that true 'Servant of Jehovah,' who lived in the heaven-born aspirations of the Church-nation, and to whom these words may with perfect justice be applied, 'The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.'³ There is therefore a general truth in the Messianic reference of psalms like the 22nd to the Lord Jesus. But it does not follow that we are bound to accept every special application of a psalm to the Christian's Messiah found in the New Testament, nor even (let us say it with due deliberateness) found in the sayings of Jesus Himself. He is a bold man who condemns us for holding with Dean Jackson that the knowledge of Jesus Christ in His

¹ See *B.L.*, p. 259.

² *Miscellanies*, p. 486.

³ Isa. liii. 5. Cf. *B.L.*, pp. 263, 264, 275.

humiliation is incomparably different from that which He has in His glorification, and for adding as a corollary that we ought to study the Psalter as the Lord, in His exalted Messianic royalty, would have us, viz. with all the reflected lights of free and honest criticism. There *are* Messianic psalms in the Psalter, just as there is a strong Messianic element in the prophecies, and though the form of the Messianism varies with the circumstances and mental furniture of the authors, yet the psalmists all agree in this—that in bringing the Messianic age Israel is to co-operate with its God. This surely is what Bishop Westcott means by that striking sentence, ‘From the date of the Return the Jews fulfilled their office as a prophetic, a *Messianic* nation.’¹ The idea of the Messianic character of Israel pervades the Psalter. It is however variously expressed. Sometimes the people of Israel is represented as doing God’s work alone (Ps. lxxxix. 38, 51); sometimes not the people, but its temporal or spiritual head (Ps. ii., xviii., lxxii., lxxxiv. 10, cxxxii. 10, 17, 18), or its personified Genius or Ideal (Ps. xxii., lxix., cii.). Whatever form the idea may assume, the Christian character of the psalm remains uninjured, and we may under due limitations safely *apply* the psalmists’ expressions to Him in whom all the promises of God are ‘yea and amen,’ and who

¹ *Thoughts on Revelation and Life*, p. 12.

doubtless had the high consciousness that in Him the aspirations of the psalmists were fully realized.¹

It is important for the English reader to study the Psalms, not only in the 'Revised Version,' but also in some entirely new translation, such as Bishop Perowne, Dr. Kay, Dr. De Witt (first edition), and the present writer (see the small *Parchment Library* edition) have supplied. For exegesis and criticism he may consult the works of Bishop Perowne and Prof. Kirkpatrick (vol. i., 1891), and for less conservative views my own commentary (1888), together with my Bampton Lectures on *The Origin and Religious Contents of the Psalter* (1891). See also the translation of Delitzsch's admirable commentary (Hodder and Stoughton), and of Ewald's slighter but masterly work (Williams and Norgate), and compare Nowack's edition of Hupfeld's *Die Psalmen* (1888). Prof. Robertson Smith's article 'Psalms' in the *Encycl. Britann.*, and chap. vii. of Prof. Driver's *Introduction* (with which comp. *Expositor*, March, 1892, p. 231, &c.), will of course not be neglected.

¹ See *B.L.*, pp. 260, 261, 266, 292, 312, 339, 340, 341, 350, 351, and cf. 21, 22, 34, 35, 141, 143, 173, 174, and cf. my *Prophecies of Isaiah*, ii. 198 &c.

CHAPTER II.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE PSALMISTS.

SOME time ago (1883) at a Church Congress I ventured on the seeming paradox that one of the Church's gains from the so-called 'higher criticism' would be a view of the inspiration of the Scriptures which was at once broader and deeper and more true to facts. It is still to too many of us a paradox, but the number of those who utter it has since then largely increased. May the following pages contribute in some faint degree to propagate it, and so to diminish the anxiety which quite unnecessarily oppresses so many minds! 'Quite unnecessarily,' may seem to some readers a bold statement, and yet children of a reformed Church ought scarcely to complain of it. For our faith is not in a book, but in Christ and His good tidings, and it is by looking at Christ that we get our only sure criterion of inspiration in the study

of Scripture. So it was with the first disciples ; so it was with the Reformers ; so, different as we are from both intellectually, it must be with us. Those parts of Scripture are most inspired, which have most in them of Christ, that is, which most directly reflect His divine personality. Less fully but not less truly inspired are those which either record or illustrate revelations of God to man in the period preparatory to Christ, and which, with whatever drawbacks, quicken our sense of the tenderness and the vastness of the divine education of the world. Christ alone by His Spirit can ‘open to us the Scriptures,’ but criticism can help to prepare our minds to receive the Spirit’s message by giving us a correct historical view of the Bible. Criticism is one of the best gifts of God to this generation : its highest object is to glorify the divine works, which are ‘sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.’

·This being the case, there is nothing strange in the suggestion which I have repeatedly made, that something should be done in our most important pulpits (especially non-parochial ones) to promote the juster comprehension of the Old Testament. In that enlargement of the range of preaching which is forced upon us by circumstances—say rather, to which we are being providentially guided,—let not the study of these priceless records be neglected. A fuller and a

truer view of inspiration is one of the greatest wants of the time ; to get this we require, for one thing, a critical and yet both popular and devout interpretation of the older Scriptures. That the laity are becoming aware of this, my own experience does not permit me to deny, nor would it become the clergy to be far behind the laity in discernment. Of course, it is not an ordinary pastor's work to produce such sermons, though an ordinary pastor may doubtless do something else to promote the same object. We require specially prepared men for such pulpits—men who have in their own persons reconciled reason and faith, and who are not altogether strangers to that 'blending process' which constitutes true inspiration. For only through inspiration can we adequately understand the writings of inspired men. Inspiration is an inward state, not only of the writer or writers of a Scripture, but also in their different degrees of its qualified interpreters and readers.

These words may perhaps provoke the charge of 'subjectivity.' I will not be angry with those who bring it, for I know that their piety is not the less sincere because it is timorous, nor the less vital because it is determined by rule and precedent. But I would ask this question, Will it be fatal to admit the justice of the charge ? Can it be proved that the promises of God and of Christ were limited to a single

age? Or that there was not abundant 'subjectivity' in the disciples who first dared to believe them? Surely in all true faith there must be a strong subjective element. The promise of 'another Paraclete' is useless for us, unless we stretch forth the hands of the soul to grasp it. Its compass moreover depends for us on our faculty of appropriation. 'However doubtful it may be,' cries an anxious theologian, 'whether the blessed Spirit may have vouchsafed to speak to him *hereon* or no!' But a joyously believing critic is convinced that he has not been 'left in orphanhood,' but has been 'guided' a few steps further towards 'all the truth' of which the Church is at present in need. There is no arrogance in this. He claims no more than others have a right to claim, but he can neither limit God's promises, nor rationalize them into unmeaning generalities. This is where the writer stood in 1883, and where he hopes that many others stand now. The Holy Spirit has not ceased to guide either the Church or its believing members, and the range of His guidance extends to things intellectual, when such guidance is important for the Church. We ought to look, not only backward to the conciliar decisions of the past, but forward to the informal but authoritative decisions of the Church of the future. It is with a view to these decisions, which the Holy Spirit will suggest to the general Christian

consciousness, that devout and critical interpreters of the Old Testament should, both in the study and in the pulpit, be working.

It is one thing however to interpret the Scriptures to oneself, and another to do so to the congregation ; it is possible to have open ears, but not open lips. It is true that He who providentially ordered my work, has promised to give me the strength to do it, if I ask Him. But I may have 'asked and received not,'¹ through some fault of my own. I desire therefore to know, directly or indirectly, from those who, in the right spirit, have either heard or read my sermons, whether I have at all succeeded. Let me first of all refer to my cathedral discourses on the accounts of David and Elijah. It was my aim in these to show, that though the writers of the narratives did not claim to be inspired, yet gleams of the light from heaven had fallen upon them. The idea may be expressed more fully thus,—that popular traditions of diverse origin were the divinely appointed channels of elementary spiritual truth to the ancient people of Israel, and that though, as Prof. Ryle puts it, 'it was the spirit and not the letter that conveyed the quickening life,' yet 'the letter itself was purified and consecrated for the purpose of conveying the message of Jehovah.'² As an evidence of this

¹ James iv. 3.

² Address at the Rhyl Church Congress, 1891.

compare, or rather contrast, the Hebrew form of the Flood-story with what is probably its Babylonian original.¹ Now, have I been able to make this point clear—viz. that their capacity for leavening popular traditions with moral and spiritual truth constitutes the special claim of the early Hebrew narrators to our reverence? I would not of course be taken to suppose that all the ancient narratives referred to are equally penetrated by high ideas. That is not the case. Crude and unethical material is sometimes adopted (as in Genesis and Judges) without any spiritualization except such as it receives from the neighbourhood of ethically moulded stories. And sometimes (as in 1 Kings ii. 5–9) even a highly religious narrator falls below his ordinary ethical standard. Nor would I be considered to deny that Pindar and Æschylus had entered on the same path in Hellas, and participated (especially Pindar) in a similar inspiration to the Israelitish writers. In some respects this may even be too faint praise. The Hebrew narrators are considerably less developed morally than Pindar. For instance, they

¹ *B.L.*, pp. 270, 279, 392, 432. I do not deny that the Babylonian priests and prophets may have begun to allegorize, or at least to spiritualize, their myths. It is too soon, however, to speak definitely on this subject. At any rate, the higher elements of Babylonian religion were mixed up with lower ones of an unspiritual and naturalistic character.

take a manifest pleasure in the exhibition of craft or shiftiness. But Pindar, as we have seen (p. 35), protests against crooked policy; 'a straight course,' he says, 'is best, because it is in harmony with God.' And whereas the biographers of the patriarchs and of David knew nothing of future retribution, Pindar had certainly been visited by gleams of the hope of immortality.¹ And yet, from a Christian vantage-ground, must we not admit that the high intuitions of the latter were marred by serious error, for want of that succession of prophetic teachers which was granted to the Israelites? Pindar and his fellow-poets had not the promise of the future; they do not shine with that reflected brightness which belongs to those who have helped to found a Church. And therefore, much as I admire those devout poets, I can but give them a place in an appendix to my Bible, while the works of the (in many respects) far less gifted Hebrew narrators remain, and will remain, among the Holy Scriptures of the Old Covenant.

I would next venture to refer to a pulpit-exposition of the life and work of Jeremiah, which forms the basis of a continuous study on the same subject. Spiritual prophecy in the midst of a heathen world is admittedly one of the greatest proofs of God's

¹ Pind. *Ol.* ii. 109-140; *Fragm.* xcvi. 2-4. From what source did Pindar derive this intuition? Not at any rate from the contemporary popular belief.

working in history. So surprising is it that, both in Zarathustra and in Amos and his successors, one can only explain it adequately on the hypothesis of prophetic inspiration. Now I ventured to think that I could promote the study of this great work of God by devoting a series of sermons to Jeremiah. He is the last and in some respects the greatest of the pre-Exile prophets, and his prophecies derive a special charm from his having uttered them in spite of himself, with faltering lips and with a consciousness of natural disqualifications. It seemed to me a task well fitted for a cathedral preacher to point out in Jeremiah that blending of the divine and the human which is the special characteristic of inspiration. How indeed could this shrinking youth have spoken as he did, had he not been in the truest sense inspired, had he not been 'borne along' by a gale from above? ¹ Yes; Jeremiah will reward an attentive study. It is true, he is not altogether an easy prophet, because of the varied problems which his life and times present to us. But it is worth while to make an effort to understand him, since even a moderate amount of success will throw a bright light on the development of the 'prophetic nation.' Did the attempt which was made in Rochester cathedral have any measure of success?

¹ See the Greek of 2 Pet. i. 21.

Did not only Jeremiah but the great fact of inspiration become more intelligible to the congregation? Did thoughtful and devout laymen begin to perceive that there were many degrees and varieties among inspired men—that the lowest (see the early narratives) was not less truly divine than the highest, and that the highest was not less truly human than the lowest.

And lastly take the Psalms. For three years I have discoursed on these hallowed monuments of the sweetest and holiest piety that was possible before Christ. Controversy I have as much as possible avoided, believing that on this subject especially the positive statement of truth is more effective than the contradiction of error. A not unimportant part of the truth concerning the psalms is the determination of the period (I do not say the year) to which they belong, without which exposition tends to become insipid, and our view of the inspiration of their authors untrue to facts. This work having been done by critics with quite sufficient precision for practical purposes, I thought it my duty to give some hints on the matter to my hearers. 'Our Christian chilliness'¹ would, it seemed, be more effectually cured, could we but feel the pulsations of the warm human heart in the psalms. But did I exaggerate

¹ Alexander Knox.

the human and historical element in these divine songs? Surely not. How small a place was given to the historical backgrounds of the psalms compared with that accorded to the spiritual instincts and intuitions of the psalmists! On these I bestowed my most loving care; I studied them on all sides; I urged their appropriation. And yet, forsooth, some one has described me as attacking the inspiration of the psalms! I need therefore to be assured by my hearers or readers whether they have not been helped to feel more vividly the divine element in the psalms. It is true, I did not often use the word inspiration, because in fact it is so often connected with an untenable theory. It is also true that I have myself no theory of inspiration to offer. 'The human and the divine are held together in an union which is organic and unanalyzable. They have not been mixed together, they have grown together,'¹ and only He who produces the vital processes can explain them. One thing however was open to me—to study in their combination the piety of the psalmists and the conditions under which it arose. I thought that I could throw some light on their spiritual history, and on the circumstances which, under God's chastening hand, converted them into

¹ Rev. J. G. Richardson, at the Southwell Diocesan Conference, Oct. 1888.

heroes of faith. I hoped that I could help my hearers to realize the spiritual fervour which made the Jewish nation a church, and its spokesmen prophets. And I believed that by so doing I was promoting a higher view of inspiration. Was my language at all obscure? Then let me here state some sufficient reasons for holding the psalms to be 'inspired.'

My first reason shall be a critical one. I have already quoted a deep but enigmatic sentence from Bishop Westcott which describes the Jews as 'a prophetic, a Messianic nation.'¹ It appears to mean that the gifts and functions which were formerly assigned to the prophets and to the ideal king of the future were transferred (cf. Isa. lv. 3, 4) to the Jews as a nation. Now the psalmists, as critical exegesis proves, wrote as the representatives of the Church-nation. Therefore that holy Spirit which dwelt within Israel spoke through them; they are in a true though not in the traditional sense inspired prophets.² Does any one think this view strange? Then let him consider that true prophecy is closely connected with prayer. '*Call unto me,*' says Jehovah

¹ See above, p. 139. The Bishop does not, indeed, use the word 'inspired.' But the indwelling of the Divine Spirit in the Church-nation is a characteristic post-Exile idea (see sermon on Ps. li. 11); it means that the pious wish of Moses (Num. xi. 29) is in course of fulfilment.

² *B.L.*, pp. 15, 30, 272, 284.

in Jeremiah, '*and I will answer thee, and will show thee great things, and difficult, which thou knowest not.*'¹

Now what, upon the whole, is the Psalter but a collection of prayers and answers to prayers, accompanied, as a necessary consequence, by grateful thanksgivings? And what are the points of central interest in this collection? Surely the transitions from seeking to appropriating faith—in other words, the prophetic assurances that God has accepted the Church-nation's petitions. These assurances are in fact the most inspired portions of the Psalter. They seem to have reached the psalmists in the temple (Ps. v. 3, cf. 7; lxxiii. 17), and correspond as nearly as possible to the revelations of the prophets. We need not then be surprised that the writers of the psalms ever and anon adopt the language of prophecy,² thus indirectly at least claiming inspiration. Yes, the psalmists *are* 'borne by a holy spirit,' and free criticism, by showing that the psalms, with few if any exceptions, belong to the post-Exilic period, when the gift of the Spirit had passed from individuals to the Church-nation at large, has made it all the easier to give an ungrudging attestation of the

¹ Jer. xxxiii. 3 (cf. *B.L.*, p. 64).

² See Ps. xii. 5, xlv. 10, l. 4-21, lxxv. 2-5, lxxxi. 6-16, and cf. xlix. 4, where inspiration is directly claimed. Imprecatory passages like xxi. 9-12, lvi. 7, &c., are not to be included (cf. my *Jeremiah*, p. 111).

fact. Here is my first argument for their inspiration.

I pause for a moment to qualify what I have just said. Perfect indeed the inspiration of the psalmists is not ; the later views on this subject are as baseless as the corresponding Indian views on the inspiration of the Vedic hymns. The psalmists are the successors of the prophets, and in a true sense prophets themselves. But they do not, like the prophet-poet Zarathustra, claim to have received absolutely right words, and in the case of Ps. cix. 6-20 we must assert that the prophetic presentiment of the writer is 'corrupted by the infirmities of human passion.'¹ The blending of the human and the divine element is in fact not always complete; in this respect the psalmists sometimes remind us of that true but imperfect prophet Jeremiah. Shall we despise them on this account? No; but rather love and pity as well as venerate them. They speak in 'the language of the sons of men'; they are not angels, but the human heralds of the Christ. And how great they are, in spite of their limitations! This will, I hope, appear from my two next arguments. To those, then, who ask why the psalmists are inspired, I reply secondly that their words have a greater fulness of meaning than those of other gifted religious poets. Let me appeal

¹ *B.L.*, p. 64.

here to common experience. How many times have we all, critics and non-critics alike, received messages through the psalms from that God of love, who 'guideth us with his eye.'¹ Is there any other religious poetry of which we can say this, or to which we can so truly apply that phrase of Keble—'eye of God's Word'? A prismatic radiance belongs to these earliest utterances of a new-found spiritual religion. And in saying this I have already suggested another peculiar quality in the language of the Psalter—originality. The psalmists were in fact the first to devise an adequate lyric expression for spiritual ideas. Contrast them in this respect with the great Iranian prophet, whose awkward and uncouth phraseology puts such a strain on his ablest modern interpreters.² In other words, the Hebrew poets had in some sense a more direct contact with the inspiring Spirit than any previous or subsequent religious poets.

And my third reply is this—that the works of the psalmists have exercised a formative influence over a far greater multitude than any of the 'prophetic masters'³ of the past or the present. How the Lord Jesus delighted in the psalms, and how they

¹ Ps. xxxii. 8.

² The Oxford translator may, I fear, often be too subtle.

³ I adopt the phrase from Bishop Westcott.

helped 'to form His chosen ones for the Christ and the Christ for His chosen,'¹ need not again be said. Nor need I repeat the evidence from history and biography which has been admirably though not exhaustively collected by Dr. Ker. We will not detract from the merits of the followers of the psalmists. Dante and, among ourselves, Browning have been instruments owned of God for the renewal and edification of souls. But they appeal only to Western readers, and to an intellectual aristocracy among these, whereas we may say of the psalmists that 'their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words into the ends of the world.'

I trust that no one will fail to recognize the church feeling which animates these remarks. Not to them do these words of a learned opponent of the 'higher criticism' apply,—

'The testimony of the Church, the canonicity of the Book, the judgment of Catholic writers, all become as nothing. The judgment of the individual, on the presupposition that he is qualified to form it, is to settle the question, however doubtful it may be whether the blessed Spirit may have vouchsafed to speak to him hereon or no.'²

¹ *B.L.*, p. 261.

² Bishop Ellicott, *Visitation Charge*, Oct. 1891. For my own part I think that the use which Jesus Christ made of the Old Testament proves that there is in it so strong a divine element as to separate it in some sense from all other books (except the New Testament), though I must qualify this by saying that the canon of the Old Testament was not finally settled in all its parts in our Lord's time, and that a spiritual tact guided Him, as it ought to guide His disciples, to a Bible within the Bible.

For the first is altogether objective, while, of the two latter, one of the above arguments asserts that the Psalter has a voice for every member of the universal Church, and the other, that the Church in all times and countries has acknowledged its unique power. We dare not however assent to Bishop Elliott's view that no sympathy should be felt with individualism, for we can see that it both was and is a necessary reaction against the exaggerated authority of tradition. It is our inheritance from the struggles of the Reformation, and we cannot dispense with it, however much we value that living sense of connexion with the past which is equally our birthright. It is our duty, not to rest in any tradition however time-honoured, but to contribute to its purification and enrichment. And how can we do this in the sphere of religion without applying a free, and in the best sense of the word *subjective* criticism to the Scriptures? Yes, indeed; the combined action of the trained subjectivities of critics is the right criticism for the modern Christian Church. We will not be ashamed to confess that we do 'determine the inspiration of the Book from its internal character and the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking in it to the believer,' nor can we doubt that the 'Spirit of truth' will 'guide' us aright in our determination. But we also gratefully acknowledge the utility of the Church tradition,

which, in favourable cases, points the way to a fact, and is at any rate the necessary starting-point of critical investigation.

Nor should there be any offence to Church feeling in a reference to Dante and Browning as inspired. For it cannot be intended by this to equalize them with the psalmists. The biographers of David are, as we have seen, inspired, but they are certainly not inspired in the same measure as the psalmists. Nor can we say that even the verse of Dante, laden with the richest Christian thought and feeling, is on a level, religiously, with the psalms. There are not indeed two inspirations, for there is but one Holy Spirit. But there are many degrees and varieties of inspiration. And the inspiration of the psalmists—or, let me say at once, of the writers of the Scriptures in general, is supreme. These writers stand at the head of that current of spiritual influence which has renewed and is renewing the world. The wise and holy men, the saints and doctors and poets who came after them, could not help borrowing from them.

Hither, as to their fountain, other stars
Repairing in their golden urns draw light.

But what shall we say of those ancient races which knew not the Psalter? Did God leave Himself without witness in the realm of song? No. Zwingli did

but revive the tradition of the first great Christian thinkers when he dignified the noblest classic masters by the title 'divine,' and the best Anglican teachers of our own day are with him. This way of viewing such poets as Pindar, Æschylus, and Euripides offers no difficulties to us of this generation. Their moral fervour, and the spiritual turn which they gave to Greek mythology, are so wonderful, that we gladly recognize them as inspired. It is otherwise however with those still more ancient poets who, being liturgical, should be nearest of kin to the psalmists—the authors of the Vedic and the Gâthic hymns. We are probably not ourselves Sanskrit or Zend scholars, and the progress of Oriental studies may come but slowly within our ken. It is natural for us therefore to hesitate when devout students of comparative religion invite us to recognize the voice of God in the words of Vasishtha or Zarathustra. The late Dean Church has given utterance to this widely diffused feeling in that fine though not faultless eulogy of the Psalms which deserves to stand beside Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*.¹ When for instance Prof. Max Müller speaks of the Vedic priest-poet Vasishtha as 'a man who in the noble army of prophets deserves a place by the side of David,'¹ Dean

¹ *Introd. to the Science of Religion*, p. 232. A learned missionary (Dr. Robson) agrees that 'the feelings of awe, sinfulness, and contrition

Church exclaims that 'only unconscious prepossession could blind a sagacious and religious mind to the immeasurable interval between [Vasishtha's hymn to Varuna] and the 51st psalm.'¹ But the Professor had already said that, while recognizing the beauty of this Vedic hymn, he was 'not blind to its blemishes,' and I will add that half the sympathy which we bring to the 'psalms of David' would reveal the most delicate morning-hues in the prayer of Vasishtha. The Dean, as is natural, looks at religious poetry from a Christian, the Professor from a historical point of view; the position which I am seeking to recommend does justice to both. From a Christian point of view the 51st psalm is superior to the hymn of Vasishtha, because it is nearer to the perfect religion of Christ. From a historical one, the two are of equal worth both being required to fill out our conception of the development of religious belief. And from the point of view of a historical and yet Christian theology, though the inspiration of the psalmist, being fuller in

. . . make them (the hymns to Varuna) liker the Hebrew psalms than anything else in profane poetry' (*Hinduism*, &c., p. 19). The passages relative to Varuna in the Rig Veda are given by Dr. Muir (*Sanskrit Texts*, V. 61-67, 76) and by M. Darmesteter (*Ormazd et Ahriman*, part i., chaps. v. and vi.). The latter remarks, 'Tel est Varuna . . . Il a organisé le monde, il en est le maître, il en connaît les mystères, il est le fondateur de l'ordre matériel et moral; il est créateur souverain, omniscient, dieu d'ordre.' How then does the worship of Varuna differ from that of Ahura Mazda or of Jehovah? In its entanglement with naturalism.

¹ *Early Sacred Poetry*, p. 31.

volume than that of Vasishtha, is of more value for our own spiritual life, yet since both poets are ministers of God, both give us equal cause to praise Him 'who sits at the keyboard of the universe, and touches now with lighter and now with more constraining force the chords of the human spirit.'¹

Need I explain that this recognition of a divine element in the Vedic hymns to Varuna by no means pledges us to an admiring eulogy of the entire Rig Veda? The chief test of a religion is the morality which it inculcates. Now Vedic morality in general is superficial and ritualistic. Only in connexion with the cult of Varuna does it 'go down into the depths of the conscience, and realize the idea of holiness.'² But the moral law of the psalmists is 'exceeding broad,' and extends to the thoughts and intents of the heart. Am I insensibly falling back into the too partial estimate of Dean Church? By no means. I hasten to add that the psalms were not 'composed in an age as immature as that of the singers of the Veda,' but (as Quinet saw) in a far more advanced society and after a vastly more complete spiritual discipline, and that we are therefore much less surprised at their appearance in the Church-nation than at the lonely beauties of the hymns to Varuna.

¹ Sanday, *The Oracles of God*, p. 100.

² Barth, *Religions of India*, p. 17.

Dean Church does not mean to be unfair ; he is only jealous for the honour of the Psalter. I agree with him, so far as he opposes that shallow rationalism which compares 'David' to Æschylus in order to undivinize both. But I also sympathize with Prof. Max Müller in his free and frank admission of the divine voice in the hymns to Varuna. This 'catholicity of appreciation' may at present appear too bold ; Æschylus may have many more friends than Vasishtha. But whenever the facts of the comparative study of religion become more generally known, we may be allowed to hope that the judgment of a less instructed age may be reversed.

But neither Æschylus nor Vasishtha founded or reformed a Church. Their lesser glories sink into insignificance beside that of Zarathustra (Zoroaster), as he is depicted with perfect unconsciousness by himself. Not in India but in eastern or north-eastern Irán was the great step completely taken from a slightly spiritualized nature-worship to the one true spiritual God. Even the cultus of the 'holy' deity Varuna never lost its physical basis ; Varuna was properly the divinized nightly sky. Varuna might conceivably have developed into Ahura Mazda (the 'much knowing Lord') ; but very few will be convinced by the author of *Ormazd et Ahri-man* that this was actually the course of history. Not

without a special creative impulse can the religion of the Gâthâs have arisen ; no *mere* development can account for it. ‘ So lofty and so pure is the spirit of the Gâthâs, and, in contrast to the Vedic hymns, so anti-mythological is their tendency, that at first one can hardly believe that they are ancient, and yet the fall in the tone of the later Avesta makes it still more difficult to believe that they are modern.’¹ They are in fact placed by many good Zend scholars in an age anterior to that of David, and perhaps hardly later than that of Moses. That Zarathustra both claimed to be and was a prophet, even M. de Harlez admits ; the severest criticism can find no flaw in his title. That he was also a poet, his own hymns show ; and if his phraseology is uncouth, who can wonder at this in a poet who had no predecessors ? At any rate, the general purport of his hymns is admitted to be clear, in spite of much uncertainty on minute points of philology. The faith in a righteous and loving God, and in a happy immortality for His faithful servants, pervades the Gâthâs, and it is Zarathustra’s glory to have taught these truths (which constitute ethical monotheism) when probably the children of Israel had at most taken the first steps towards them. Zarathustra has also what Pindar and Æschylus lacked—the glory reflected upon the founder of a Church ; and

¹ *B.L.*, p. 395.

one may fairly assert that, had there been in Irán a succession of spiritual prophets like Zarathustra, the chief factor in the religion of the future might have been not Semitic, but Aryan. This indeed was not the will of Providence. But a compensation was, as I have sought to make probable, granted to the Zoroastrian Church, viz. that Israel should be helped directly or indirectly in the solution of its religious problems by the stimulus of Persian ideas. In its conception of God and of morality, there was much harmony between the religions of Jehovah and of Mazda, and it is hard to believe that the later Jewish faith did not owe something to the more advanced Zoroastrian religion. It will follow that if, as may reasonably be held, a considerable group of psalms belongs to the late Persian period, some of these may not impossibly reveal traces of the faith in immortality. And even apart from this, we have grounds for venerating Zarathustra as an inspired prophet and poet, second to none in fervour and in originality.

All this is true, and needs to be pressed upon the Christian public. Israel was the predestined leader of religious progress precisely because it developed so slowly and so safely. Its great collection of sacred songs has become classical, precisely because it has not chronological originality. But now I must in conclusion emphasize those points which constitute

the true originality and supreme inspiration of the Psalter. Not only in its expressive power, but, still more, in the combined purity, richness, and spirituality of its ideas it takes the first rank. Those ideas may have a history, and teachers both within and without Israel may have contributed to their development. But God guided that history and that development, that in the end His true Israel might obtain universal forms for expressing those spiritual instincts 'in the abiding of which is the abiding of spiritual life, and upon the experiences of which all spiritual knowledge is built up.' Come then, gentle reader, study the psalms with me by the light of a free but devout criticism, and help the Church to gain (or, to regain) a fuller and a deeper and a more historical doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures.

On the relations between Zoroastrianism and Judaism, see Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Manual of the Science of Religion* (Lond., 1891); Cheyne, *The Origin and Religious Contents of the Psalter* (1891), pp. 271-272, 394-425, 433 &c.; also 'Possible Zoroastrian Influences on the Religion of Israel,' in the *Expository Times*, June, July, and Aug. 1891, and reply to Mr. Gladstone, *Nineteenth Century*, Dec. 1891. On the Gâthâs, see *Zendavesta*, vol. iii. by Mills (in 'Sacred Books of the East'), and de Harlez's French version (1881); cf. also the references in my *Origin of the Psalter*, pp. 434-437. For a vivid picture of Zarathustra himself, see Ragozin, *Media* ('Story of the Nations'), and especially Geldner's art. 'Zoroaster' in *Encycl. Britannica*. The scepticism of some writers does scant justice to the work of living critics.

CHAPTER III.

PSALM LI.

(Introduct. to Pss. xxxii. and li.)

PSS. xxxii. and li., according to the traditional theory, belong to the same period in David's life. The latter was spoken, it is thought, when David had gone home to his house and thought over what Nathan had said to him and he to Nathan. It was not enough to know that 'Jehovah had put away' this last great sin of his, and that he should not himself die (2 Sam. xii. 13). The forgiveness which he needed was regeneration, having truth in the inward parts, and knowing wisdom secretly.¹ And when peace began to return to David's troubled breast, he at once entered on the work which he had vowed to undertake—that of 'teaching transgressors the ways of God.' This is recorded, it is supposed, in Ps. xxxii. David first describes his own bitter-sweet

¹ Maurice, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 64.

experiences. 'The prophet Nathan [had come] at the appointed moment to tell him in clear words . . . that which he had been hearing in muttered accents within his heart long before.'¹ From this he then draws a moral for 'every one that has duteous and practical love to God.' Next, he recites a word which has been put in his mouth by his divine Teacher, that he may by it teach others. Man is no better than a beast if he does not obey the sweet guidance of Jehovah's eye. But, so far as this picture is based on David's story, it is historically and psychologically wrong. David could not have had these ideas. Orelli praises David in that so common a sin of Oriental despots 'gave such a shock to his conscience that he expressed his penitence as no saint has ever done.'² David is therefore the spiritual equal of St. Paul or St. Augustine. Can this be? Read 2 Sam. xii., and judge. David's conscience was fast asleep till Nathan came to him. He needed a childlike story to rouse him; does the author of either psalm write as if he had required this? Ps. xxxii. is at any rate not Davidic; nothing in it can even plausibly be explained by 2 Sam. xii. And as to Ps. li., let the reader candidly weigh the exegesis of my sermon. *It is misplaced moderation to say that any part of this*

¹ Maurice, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 63.

² Art. 'David,' in Herzog-Plitt's *Encyclopædia*, iii. 519.

psalm requires or even favours an individualizing reference. When were the psalms written? If, as Dr. Driver thinks and (in 1881) Dr. Robertson Smith thought, *vv.* 18 and 19 belong to the original psalm, then the psalm must be post-Exilic, the reference being not to the return from Babylon, but to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (cf. Ps. cii. 13, 14, cxlvii. 2). But even if this is not the case (see p. 213), there are two strong reasons for a post-Exilic date, viz. 1. the acquaintance of the author with Isa. xl.-lxvi., and 2. the expression 'Cast me not away from thy presence,' which means primarily (see p. 201), 'Cast me not away from thy land.' On the whole subject, comp. *B.L.*, pp. 161-2, 174-5, 235-6, 248 note ^{hh}, 473 (against Halévy).

Ps. li. 1.—*Have pity upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness ;*

*According to the multitude of thy mercies
wipe out my transgressions.*

I propose to devote three studies to the beautiful 51st psalm, which can hardly be appreciated duly as long as it is ascribed to David. Even a Mohammedan theologian ¹ feels in some dim way the impropriety of such a combination as the authorship of the 51st

¹ *La perle précieuse de Ghazâlî* (traité d'eschatologie musulmane), par ucien Gautier, pp. 63-64. Cf. also Korân, xxxviii. 20-24.

psalm and the murder of Uriah. It is in an account of the day of judgment. The dead, both great and small, were gathered together at the bar of divine justice. At last the cry was heard, 'David!'—and David came trembling like a leaf under a violent wind; his knees knocked together, and pale was his countenance. The Most High said to him, 'David! Gabriel saith that he placed the Psalter in thy hands. Canst thou bear witness that he gave it to thee?' And David answered, 'Yea, Lord.' And God said, 'Return into thy flesh, and read that which was revealed to thee.' Now David had the most beautiful voice of all the sons of men. But, lo! the man who was killed before the ark of the covenant heard the sound of David's voice. He rushed into the crowd, and came and seized David, and said, 'Was it the Psalter which moved thee to do me a grievous wrong?' Upon this God turned to David, and said, 'Is that true which he hath said?' 'Yea, Lord, it is true,' he answered, hanging his head with shame, but hoping in God's sure promises of pardon to the penitent. Then said God to David, 'Surely I pardon thee; return, and finish the reading of the Psalter.' We see the point of this story. David could not read the 51st psalm, because he felt the strong inconsistency between its spiritual language and the grossness of his own sin.

It would be futile to ask, Who wrote the 51st psalm, if David did not? There were many sweet psalmists of Israel, but they have not cared to perpetuate their names, for their inspiration was no merely personal gift: it came through the Church. Their individual hopes (if such they had) they rejoiced to lay at the feet of that Israel to whom they owed their all, and who was to them like a personal friend. It was in the temple probably that the impulse to write seized them; in the temple that those prophetic assurances came which are the heart of the psalms. How should they have dreamed of ascribing to themselves that which came through the Church from God? Let us rather inquire, What does the psalm itself tell us as to the period of its composition? The period—this alone it is essential to know—not the precise year, or even the precise decade, any more than the name of the writer. And if it be asked why it is *essential* to know this, I reply, Because if we choose a wrong period—a period of rest and tranquillity, or even of only moderate unrest and unhappiness, we may easily give a false interpretation to some difficult words. One thing is clear at the outset—viz. that when the last two verses were written, the walls of Jerusalem had been thrown down, and the sacrificial offerings interrupted. This points either to the Exile, or, since nothing is said of

returning from Babylon, to some specially gloomy period after the Return from Babylon, such as that which so deeply moved the pious heart of Nehemiah. But as many critics have supposed that these verses were added later, I shall lay more stress on the evidence supplied by verses 1-17.

The ideas which lie at the root of the psalm are those of the Books of Jeremiah and the Second Isaiah (Isa. xl.-lxvi.), the authors of which lived long after the time of David. We shall see this very clearly in the course of our study of the psalm. Nor can it be questioned that those for whom the psalm was written regarded the Mosaic Law as the rule of their conduct. Before the Exile the Law was very little known and very little observed. But there is a sense of spiritual outlawry throughout the 51st psalm such as only the Law could create. This entirely suits the period which opens with the return from Exile. The Jews who came home from Babylon had two 'schoolmasters' (to apply St. Paul's phrase) to bring them, not indeed to Christ, but to an almost Christian view of God. These schoolmasters were—a long series of afflictions which only began with the Exile, and the Law which became fully established under Ezra. The Law taught them how manifold and searching were the requirements of divine righteousness, and affliction led them to examine their own ways more and

more carefully, to find out what might be displeasing to God. They were no longer satisfied with an external or negative view of morality. An 'inner world of sin' revealed itself to their view. Not only sins of word and of deed, but sins of thought,¹ burdened their conscience; and not only conscious but unconscious sins² give occasion to pressing supplications for forgiveness. What an immeasurable advance beyond the spiritual condition of the age of David!

Another indication of the period to which the 51st and many other psalms belong is the conception of Israel as not only a people but a Church;—Israel has become, as I called it just now, a Church-nation. Before the Exile, it was only the prophets and their disciples who had a sense of their divine mission to proclaim the true God; after the Exile, it was the entire nation in its corporate capacity. Those psalms which most clearly express the conception of the Church are therefore virtually, if not actually, works of the later period. Their authors are either, roughly speaking, contemporaries of Ezra, or (if David and his companions) the subjects of a prophetic ecstasy which transports them (to me an inconceivable idea) to a far distant century. Each earnest Bible-student must choose between these two views, if he wishes to

¹ See Ps. xvii. 3, 4.

² Ps. xix. 13, lxix. 5, xc. 8.

read the psalms intelligently. And if you ask more particularly, What kind of idea of the Church did the psalmists possess?—I reply that this must be gathered from the Book of the Second Isaiah (Isa. xl., &c.), which was the treasure committed to the Jews at the close of the Exile for their comfort and instruction. The central figure of that unique prophetic Scripture is a personage called ‘the Servant of Jehovah’ (or, the Lord). And putting aside for the moment the wonderful 53rd chapter of Isaiah there is no doubt that as a rule the ‘Servant of Jehovah’ is, to use a popular mode of expression, the Jewish Church. The conception of the, as it were, personal life of the Church is perhaps a difficult one for us to grasp, but it is (as we shall see later on) essentially Jewish,¹ and it is most emphatically put forward again and again in the New Testament. It is also in perfect harmony with the teaching of some of the greatest writers, such as St. Augustine and Friedrich Schlegel, who tell us how the development of the human race as a whole presents the same features and follows the same stages as that of an individual between infancy and manhood. What, then, does the conception mean in the Scriptures? Not always quite the same thing, at least in our earliest authority, the Book of the Second Isaiah.

¹ See pp. 190–191, and cf. Eph. iv. 13–16.

In Isa. xlii. 18–20 we read, *‘Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I send? . . . Thou seest many things, but thou observest not; his ears are open, but he heareth not!’* And in Isa. xliii. 8 Jehovah says, *‘Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears,’* i.e. *‘that have eyes, and yet see not, that have ears, and yet hear not, the teaching of God in history and revelation.’* In these passages, the Jewish Church is described, not as a mere collection of individuals, but as the organic unity to which the individuals belong, and upon which they depend.

In so far the prophet’s description is in harmony with every statement respecting the Church upon earth which we find elsewhere. But in one important respect it differs from other passages, viz. that it depicts the Church in colours borrowed from the majority of its existing members. Turn over a few pages, and you will find very different language. In Isa. xlix. 1–4 we read,—

‘Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye peoples, from far. Jehovah hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name; and he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me; and he hath made me a polished shaft, in his quiver hath he kept me close; and he said unto me, Thou art my servant; Israel, in whom I will be glorified. But I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and vanity; yet verily my judgment is with Jehovah, and my recompence with my God.’

Here it is obvious that the colours in which the organic unity called the Church is depicted are borrowed not from the majority but from the minority of its existing members, and it will also be obvious from the two following verses that even these are idealized ; for we read,—

‘And now saith Jehovah that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, and that Israel be gathered unto him, . . . it is too light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel ; I will also give thee for a light to the nations, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.’

Here the Servant of Jehovah, that is, the personalized Church, is described partly in accordance with the character of the best living Israelites—those who are conscious of their high calling to proclaim the one true God, and partly in accordance with an ideal of the Church existing in the mind of God. There are some persons, I know, who think that to speak of a thing as ideal is to deny its objective existence. How little they sympathize with the prophets and apostles ! St. Paul has no doubt that there is an ideal Jerusalem which, though invisible, is before God not less real than the visible, earthly Jerusalem. *‘Jerusalem which is above,’* he says, *‘is free, which is the mother of us all.’*¹ And the great prophet, whom we call the Second Isaiah, believes in

¹ Gal. iv. 26.

an ideal Zion and an ideal Israel, and holds it to be the business of all faithful Israelites to work together with God in making these ideal forms objective to human sight.

And now, I hope, we can see our way to a third interpretation of the 'Servant of Jehovah.' It is one that could not, so far as we know, have been understood by the ancient prophet, but for all that it is a natural development out of his theology. The Servant of Jehovah, the true Israel, in whom, as the prophet says, God will be glorified, is Jesus Christ. The ideal, being heavenly and divine, is therefore most real; is therefore in the fulness of time bound to become the actual. And with equal truth it may be said that the Scripture is bound to be fulfilled, i.e. to have its latent fulness of meaning brought out. Now one of the greatest of the Scriptures says that Israel 'Jehovah's Servant' shall redeem, not only those unworthy Israelites who form the majority of the nation, but also the Gentile peoples. But could the noblest members of the nation do this? Could even Jeremiah or the Second Isaiah? Eminent indeed these great prophets are; they rise like mountain-peaks above their brethren. But even they, being chiefly the spokesmen of Another, were incapable of performing the great things which they announced. As heralds, their voice was clear and soul-stirring.

They declared that in the near future God would write His laws on the hearts of Israel, and that then the people should be ‘all righteous,’ because ‘all taught of God.’¹ But how could either of them undertake to do this himself? Why, as our lay-theologian De Quincey says, ‘No exhibition of blank power—not the arresting of the earth’s motion—not the calling back of the dead unto life can approach in grandeur to this miracle, the inconceivable mystery of having written and sculptured upon the tablets of man’s heart a new code of moral distractions.’ So far De Quincey. Now Jesus Christ performed and, as a Christian can rejoicingly say, daily performs this miracle. Jesus Christ therefore is the true Servant of Jehovah, the true Israel. Not Jacob but Jesus is the true head of God’s people ; whatever His people do, Jesus does ; for He and they are one. Not Israel but Christ Jesus is the vine, and His disciples are the branches.

Here is indeed a glorious conception ; here is the true theory of the Catholic Church, which all living Christians, whatever their differences of expression, in their heart of hearts accept, the theory, I will add, which, with the necessary limitations, will alone enable us to do justice to the phenomena of the Psalter. And how shall we proceed in applying it to what I

¹ Isa. lx. 21, liv. 13.

may call the Church-psalms? Granting that in these the 'Servant of Jehovah' is the speaker, which of the three interpretations of the phrase is most readily applicable? The first is of course everywhere unsuitable; the deaf and blind 'Servant of Jehovah' could not utter his voice in a psalm. Nor can the third have been anywhere intended by the psalmist himself; this were against the analogy of revelation elsewhere. All that we can say is that in one psalm (the 22nd) the idealization of the 'Servant of Jehovah' is so complete that in all essential points it is worthy to be an utterance of the Lord Jesus, to whom we Christians cannot but loyally apply it. In the other Church-psalms the dark shadows of the national life are more or less prominent, and especially in the so-called penitential psalms, the language of which is not to be explained away as saintly exaggeration. Still even here it is evident that the 'blind' and 'deaf' spoken of in Isa. xlii. 18, 19 have awaked to a sense of their condition, and are hastening to prepare themselves for 'the acceptable year of the Lord.'

Now the greatest of the penitential psalms is undoubtedly the 51st, but the Book of the Second Isaiah contains a long penitential meditation which appears to have been composed for church-use, and well deserves to be placed by the side of our psalm.

It extends from Isa. lxiii. 7 to lxiv. 12, and contains these remarkable words,—

*And we are all become as one that is unclean,
And all our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment :
And we all do fade as a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*¹

There is a great range of thought in the psalm. The contrast of Israel's past and present is most powerfully exhibited, and its actual depressed state is attributed to its own transgressions against Jehovah. The Church is the speaker, and her only hope is in the tender mercy of Him who is the true father of Israel. Now let us turn to the 51st psalm ; several parts of it receive fresh light from the passage to which I have just referred.

Have pity upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness.

Notice here at once that this penitential psalm is a great hymn to the divine mercy. It is the vivid sense of God's mercifulness that inspires the petition—'Have pity upon me, O God.' But it is not merely mercy or compassion for which the psalmist, in the name of the Church, pleads ; it is lovingkindness. Now 'lovingkindness' in the Old Testament means specially the covenant-love of Jehovah to His people. God is not merely man's sovereign lord, but

¹ Isa. lxiv. 6. (This section is, however, probably post-Exilic.)

the head of a community bound together by mutual love. And so in that confession of the Church in the Second Isaiah we read, '*Surely thou art our father, though Abraham knoweth us not . . . thou, O Jehovah, art our father; our redeemer is thy name from of old.*'¹ This is a deep and tender view of the nature of God. He is not as yet fully known as the father of the individual, but He is the head of a community, nay, of a family, and can no more disavow the love which binds Him to the people with which He is in covenant than He can cease to be God. Just so we read in Ps. xxv. 6, '*Remember thy compassions, O Jehovah, and thy lovingkindnesses, for they have been from of old*'; that is, ever since Israel was born as a nation, God has graciously fulfilled His covenant promises to it, and how should God be unfaithful to Himself? The psalmist continues, '*According to the multitude of thy compassions blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*' Each line, almost each word, has a deep thought. One of those covenant-promises, to which the Church makes its first appeal, is this—'*I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sin.*'² These words are in the psalmist's favourite prophetic Scripture—the Book of the Second Isaiah. They give us

¹ Isa. lxiii. 16.² Isa. xliii. 25; cf. xliv. 22.

a thrilling idea of the completeness of the covenant-provision for sin—‘to forgive’ with God is ‘to forget.’ And the opening words of verse 2, strictly rendered, are—‘Wash me often and wash me thoroughly as a fuller doth.’ Is not this suggestive? First, of the condition of the Church, i.e. of the human race, by nature. Sin is so deeply ingrained in mankind that as Jehovah says by the prophet Jeremiah, ‘*Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me.*’¹ And the weakness of many parts of the prophecies is simply this—that the prophets do not always tell us how this sad defect of nature is to be remedied. ‘*O Jerusalem,*’ says Jeremiah, ‘*wash thine heart from wickedness that thou mayest be saved.*’² How pathetic these limitations of holy men are! Later on, Jeremiah knew by revelation that the days were coming when God Himself would ‘thoroughly wash’ His people, and ‘write His law in their heart.’ And so our psalmist, who lived after the time of Jeremiah, when the Jewish nation had become a Church, and a foretaste of evangelical blessings was already enjoyed, could offer these words for the use of the Church, ‘Wash me (i.e. we thy Church) often and thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me (pronounce me clean, as the priest pronounces the recovered leper to be clean)

¹ Jer. ii. 22.² Jer. iv. 14; cf. my *Jeremiah*, p. 152.

from my deeply-dyed sin.' Nor can I help connecting these words with a later verse of the same psalm, 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean ; wash me thoroughly, and I shall be whiter than snow. Myself I cannot purify, any more than the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots.¹ Be thou my priest ; declare me pure, like the priest with the ceremonial hyssop, and then shall I be whiter than snow.' And now for the second plea for pardon,

For I acknowledge my transgressions,

And my sin is ever before me.²

The Church-nation here pleads to be forgiven on the ground of its sincere confession. There was a notion prevalent among most ancient peoples and not least in Israel that the divine forgiveness could be purchased by a costly sacrifice. This has now so far disappeared from Israel that a temple-poet can venture to disregard it altogether. The efforts of the old prophets, especially Jeremiah (xxxi. 34), have been almost crowned with success. No priest is needed by such believers as the psalmist to specify the particular sacrifice which will atone for sin ; for all men may have a direct knowledge of God, and sacrifices are, to those who can receive the saying, but the holiest of symbolic forms. Or rather, the true sacrifice is—the hearty confession of sin.

¹ Jer. xiii. 23.

² Cf. Isa. lix. 12b.

We have now, I hope, caught a glimpse of what was in the psalmist's mind when he wrote the first three verses of the 51st psalm. To repeat them in his sense and with his degree of fervour would no doubt be difficult. First of all, is England one, as Israel after the Return was one? Is it not the fact that England consists, religiously, not of one great Church but of many churches and sects, and socially, not of one nation, but of two—the rich and the poor? One may admit that the forces of union are stronger than those of disunion, and yet apprehend that it may require fresh national troubles to bring the disunited ones more completely together. And yet the 51st psalm *has* an application to ourselves. Every newspaper that we read brings to our notice some sad calamity caused by a violation of some divine law, and such calamities ought in some degree to be felt and repented of by all Christian people, for we are members one of another. In this spirit we should any and every day be ready to repeat, in the name of the Church, not only that sweet sentence ‘The Lord is my shepherd,’¹ but the sad but far from despairing words, ‘Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness.’

¹ Cf. Ps. lxxviii. 51, lxxx. 1, Mic. vii. 14.

CHAPTER IV.

PSALM LI. (*continued*).

Ps. li. 4.—*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,
And done that which is evil in thy sight :
That thou mightest be justified when thou
speakest,
And be clear when thou judgest.*

THE 51st psalm is a penitential prayer of the Church-nation of Israel, groaning under the twofold sense of sin and punishment. By a pathetic illusion, the ancient Israelites were prone to regard all misfortunes as penal ; they were unable to realize that the sins of Israel could be forgiven until its temporal afflictions had been removed. Our psalmist is no doubt feeling his way, not without a higher guidance, to a nobler view, but his aspirations are still somewhat checked by the same antiquated orthodoxy which so much troubled the afflicted Job. The salvation for which he prayed (see ver. 14) was certainly not merely a

spiritual one, and the sign of God's restored favour was not merely inward but outward prosperity. But notice here that adaptation of means to ends in which Providence delights—the words which the psalmist has chosen are so wide and comprehensive that we can perfectly well apply them to our own case when the Holy Spirit convinces us of sin without subjecting us to the fire of temporal adversity. And to the honour of the psalmist it must be said that the thought of Israel's punishment is not so painfully present to him as that of Israel's sin. That he and his have offended against the gracious heavenly Father—this it is which chiefly bows down his spirit and makes life a burden. He appeals in the first instance to Jehovah's lovingkindness, i.e. His covenant-love, which includes not merely temporal but spiritual guidance. Deep as Israel's sinfulness may be, measured by the double standard of Jehovah's Law and of the affliction which is Israel's punishment, it cannot be deeper than the divine lovingkindness and tender mercy. And in the second place the psalmist, speaking for Israel, appeals to the frankness and unreservedness of his confession. He needed no prophet like Nathan to remind him of his sin; no parable to awaken his conscience. He could have truthfully used these beautiful words of a kindred psalm,—

*My sin I made known unto thee,
And mine iniquity I covered not.*¹

And now he ventures on a third plea for pardon. It is at first sight a strange one. He might well have prefaced it with those humble words of Abraham, when pleading for others, 'Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes.'² But we dare not blame him for not doing so; Abraham was not so severely tried as these poor oppressed Israelites.

*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,
And done that which is evil in thy sight :
That thou mayest be justified when thou speakest,
And be clear when thou judgest.*

Do you understand these words? Luther, to whom this psalm was so dear, found them the most difficult in the whole poem. David, he said, cannot have written them of himself, or, if of himself, not with reference to his recent flagrant offences against both God and man, but only as one of the great body of the saints. And do you not agree with him that the ordinary reference of this verse to David's confession of his sin, after the parable of Nathan, involves too great a strain upon our faith? Even if Uriah or Uriah's children had forgiven David, the royal penitent, if of like nature with ourselves, could not have

¹ Ps. xxxii. 5.

² Gen. xviii. 27.

said, 'Against thee, *thee only*, have I sinned.' It may be true that the sting of sin to the true penitent is that for a time it separates him from his God. But he does not on this account ignore the separation from his brother-man. 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight,' said the prodigal son, and ever must he have retained a tender sense of the trouble which he had caused to his father. 'Against thee, *thee only*,' could only be said by the Jewish Church which made it its chief concern to carry out the precepts of the Law, and was afraid (as we saw in chap. iii.) even of involuntary sins. But how could a just and generous man, like David, after having fallen into the triple sin of treachery, murder, and adultery, permit such bold words to issue from his lips? Nay, verily; misjudge not so far the most delicate character in ancient Israelitish history. It is neither David nor any other individual who speaks, but the Church-nation in its corporate capacity. Cruelly oppressed by the kings of Babylon and Persia,¹ against whom it had not sinned, it bethinks itself of one greater than they, against whom it is conscious of having deeply sinned, and who has used these unjust men as the instruments of His just anger. 'Against thee, *thee only*, have I sinned.'

¹ This interpretation of 'against thee only' is given by Chrysostom and Theodoret.

All the sins of the many thousand Israelites are but the consequence of that ingrained sinfulness which is inherent in the community to which they belong. The Servant of Jehovah is ideally but not actually perfect. As the fuller washes clothes, so must God thoroughly and often wash the garments of His Church, before He can say, 'Thou art all fair, my Bride; there is no spot in thee.'¹ 'Against thee, thee only.' But are not these words fitted to inspire alarm rather than hope? For 'the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.'² Yes; but to whom were these words addressed? Not to humble believers who confess and abhor their inconstancy. To them their sins may be a sore burden, but to the forgiving love of God these same sins are but as a spider's web.³ 'Against thee only.' Yes, indeed; rather 'against thee,' who art full of compassion and mercy, than against a fellow-servant, who will cast me into prison till I shall pay the debt. 'Against thee only.' For '*who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgres-*

¹ Song of Sol., iv. 7 (one word changed). The Song was interpreted by the Synagogue of Jehovah and Israel.

² Isa. lix. 1, 2.

³ St. Chrysostom.

*sion of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.'*¹

But the second half of the verse remains to be studied.

*That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest,
And be clear when thou judgest.*

Perhaps we are so used to these words that we do not see how hard they are. Let us try to look a little more closely into them. The phrases 'when thou speakest' and 'when thou judgest' need not detain us long. They can be explained from Ps. l., where God is imagined as a prosecutor bringing charges against the sinful Church-nation, while heaven and earth are rhetorically introduced as witnesses; and so it is in the verse now before us. But what is the meaning of the words, 'that thou mightest be justified and be clear'? We often find them explained as equivalent to 'so that thou art justified (or, declared just) and clear.' But though this is not quite impossible, the evil consequences of an action being sometimes represented, by a kind of optical illusion, as foreseen by the agent,² it is harsh in the extreme to suppose that such an idiom is used here. Are there any parallel passages in the Old Testament which may throw light upon this difficult phrase? There

¹ Mic. vii. 18.

² See e.g. Isa. xlv. 9, and cf. Matt. xxiii. 34, 35.

are ; let me only mention one which occurs in that great Church-confession in Isa. lxiii. to which I have already referred. Listen to this strange ejaculation,—
*‘ O Jehovah, why dost thou make us to err from thy ways, and hardenest our heart, so as not to fear thee ? ’*¹

Terribly strong words ! In reading them, I myself always feel impelled to lower my voice, out of reverence for the great sorrow which alone can excuse them. The case is similar to that of many passages in the Book of Job, a truly sacred Scripture, and yet not to be viewed as a storehouse of doctrine without serious injury. Only that Job resolutely insists on his own innocence, whereas both in our psalm and in the Second Isaiah the speakers confess that they have sinned. But they add (and this is the startling element in their confession) that it was God’s doing at least in part, that their freedom was imperfect, being limited by divine predestination. Will not a merciful God deal more gently with them on this account ? Yes ; these *are* startling words. But we may thank God for thus permitting in the human records of revelation so full and frank a naturalness of expression. It should be a lesson to us to be always genuine and true in our own approaches to God. ‘ Come now, and let us reason together,’² is the divine message in Isaiah ; ‘ Pour out your heart

¹ Isa. lxiii. 17 ; cf. Isa. vi. 10.

² Isa. i. 18.

before him,'¹ is the kindred exhortation of a psalmist. 'We are free to argue out the whole mystery, burden, and anguish of our experience with God, and not merely in orthodox and traditional phrasing, shut up to worship or adoration alone. Nay, verily. He loves to hear our very own thought and emotion in integrity. Measurelessly more precious to the Lord Jesus was the poor father's "Help mine unbelief" than if he had professed inviolate and untouched faith.'²

*Behold, in iniquity was I brought forth,
And in sin did my mother conceive me.*

These words may suggest the question whether they *can* really be spoken by the Church-nation, and do not rather necessarily proceed from an individual? ³ The answer is that rightly understood they do not militate against the view to which the psalm as a whole conducts us. The people of Israel is repeatedly described in the Old Testament as a living organism which passed through life-stages

¹ Ps. lxii. 8.

² Grosart, *Three Centuries of Hymns*, Preface, p. xxii.

³ Dr. Driver fully admits that Ps. li. 5 may be spoken in the name of the Church-nation, but thinks that it is 'probably better' to suppose the psalmist to be speaking [here] individually as a representative Israelite (*Introd.* p. 367). Such transitions from the Church-nation to the individual are, indeed, not unexampled. But the supposition is unnecessary, when we have thoroughly realized the connexion. Here, as elsewhere, the psalmist's ideas and expressions are moulded by his favourite prophet. See above.

similar to those of an individual.¹ Just as a family was conceived of as a living union of individuals,² so the nation was represented as a living union of families. This idea pervades the prophecies of the Second Isaiah. 'Thy first father hath sinned,'³ he says in one place; and in another, 'Thou wast called "Rebellious from the womb."' ⁴ No individual can possibly be addressed here; in the contexts of both passages 'Jacob' and 'Israel' are expressly mentioned. Now the psalmist is well acquainted with the Second Isaiah; can we help supposing that his ideas and phraseology are influenced by those of the prophet? And now notice at once the strength of his faith and the depth of his humility. 'Thy first father hath sinned,' says Jehovah by the prophet, 'therefore I gave Jacob to the ban, and Israel to reproaches.' 'In sin did my mother conceive me,' replies Israel by the psalmist, 'therefore, since I am so weak by nature, forgive me, O my God, for the past, and strengthen me for the future.' Can we help remembering the Syro-Phœnician woman in the Gospels, whom the Saviour, to try her faith, included

¹ See Ex. iv. 22; Num. xx. 14; Hos. vi. 4, vii. 9, xi. 1, xiii. 1, 13; Isa. xlv. 3, 4 (and other passages); Ps. xxv. 7, lxxi. 5, 6, 17, 18, cii. 23, 24, cxxix. 1, 2. The nation-man had a special name, Jeshurun (Deut. xxxii. 15, xxxiii. 26).

² See W. R. Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, p. 255.

³ Isa. xliii. 27.

⁴ Isa. xlviii. 8.

among the dogs, and who replied, 'Yea, Lord, for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table'?¹ The same humble faith belongs to the Jewish Church. She admits that she cannot say, 'I have set the Lord alway before me,'² and humbly urges this as a plea for mercy.

The psalmist's phraseology is seemingly, but only seemingly, a contradiction of that fine prophetic passage³ which declares that Israel had been called to proclaim the true God from its mother's womb (i.e. from the beginning of its nationality), and had obeyed the call. It speaks of those members of the Church who, like the prophet himself, earnestly sought to bear witness against Babylonian heathenism, and of all those prophets in the former age who had tried in vain to purify Israel's religion. But the psalmist, like the Second Isaiah, states that there is a wide difference between the spiritual and the natural Israel, and that the majority of Israelites in all ages have been deaf to Jehovah's voice. It implies that supernatural grace alone can make a nation into a Church; that while there are nations which have a natural gift for art, for war, and for government, there is no nation which has a natural gift for spiritual religion. This, then, is the argument of the Church, 'Thou, O God, hast called us; but without thy grace

¹ Matt. xv. 27.² Ps. xvi. 8.³ Isa. xlix. 1, 2.

we cannot obey the call. Thou askest of us obedience, but we are the children of those who turned aside quickly out of the way, and made them a molten calf. Forgive us therefore by a marvellous exhibition of thy lovingkindness, and — for this idea is already in the psalmist's mind—not only forgive, but create us anew.'

And now supplement verse 5 by verse 6. Both verses begin with 'behold,' to indicate the close relation in which they stand to each other. 'Behold, human nature is deeply ingrained with sin,' says verse 5 ; 'behold, thou desirest that it should be as deeply penetrated with truth,' says verse 6. Or, as the psalmist himself puts it,

*Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts,
Therefore in the hidden part make me to know wisdom.*

In the former passage it is Israel's deep humility which speaks ; in the latter, his no less earnest faith. By nature, he 'starts aside' continually from God 'like a broken bow' ; by grace, he is confident that the 'guile' which he has inherited from his 'first father' Jacob may give place to 'truth' and 'wisdom.' There is the same antithesis in Ps. xxxii. 1,

*Blessed is the man to whom Jehovah reckons not
iniquity,*

And in whose spirit there is no guile.

If the set of the will is towards God and His

moral law, a man is 'guileless'; if away from God, he is 'treacherous' or 'faithless.' 'Guilelessness' is a negative expression, 'truth' a positive one; but they mean the same thing. And, if you like, you may substitute the word 'constancy' or 'stability' for 'truth' and the words 'the fear of God' for 'wisdom' without any detriment to the sense. What God desires to see in the 'inward parts,' i.e. in the character, both of Israel and of each Israelite, is that stability which arises from the constant fear of God. 'The fear of God,' says the wise man, 'is the beginning of knowledge';¹ but how shall the elements of spiritual wisdom be implanted in the natural mind? 'The heart is deceitful above all things,' says Jeremiah, 'and desperately sick.'² Wisdom may 'cry aloud, and utter her voice in the streets;' but the 'simple' will still 'love simplicity, and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge,'³ until God 'creates in them a clean heart, and renews within them a constant spirit.'⁴

We are now very near the end of the first part of the psalm; the three remaining verses need only be glanced at. The 7th and 9th virtually repeat the petitions of the 1st and 2nd, but with fresh images. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean*, shows that the psalmist has begun to see the latent symbolism

¹ Prov. i. 7. ² Jer. xvii. 9. ³ Prov. i. 20, 22. ⁴ Ps. li. 10.

of the sacrificial rites. It is not however the sprinkling of the blood upon the recovered leper which attracts his attention, but the choice of a lowly plant like the hyssop as the instrument of the sprinkling. In the second part of the verse he uses the humble image of the fuller, and we cannot be surprised that in the parallel line he selects from the objects used in the rite of purification, not the precious blood, not the noble cedar-wood, but the hyssop 'that springeth out of the wall.' The idea in his mind is that of the divine condescension. For sinning but forgiven angels some grander symbol may be imagined, but for men, whose origin and whose thoughts are so low, the humblest of all the herbs is an adequate sacramental sign. Is not this idea beautiful? Is it not suggestive of Him who was meek and lowly in heart, and who cleanseth us from all sin? *Wash me*, he continues, *and I shall be whiter than snow*. To estimate this latter figure as it deserves, you should go on pilgrimage in that sacred land, where the sunlit snows of Hermon continually offer you a speaking symbol of heavenly purity. The unexpectedness gives a fresh charm to these bright glimpses, and one may well be reminded of a still more unexpected phenomenon—the transformation of our dark and selfish nature by the rays of the Sun of Righteousness.

With a boldness which God Himself has inspired, the psalmist (i.e. not David, but Israel), supplicates for this wondrous boon, and as he prays he conceives the possibility of a return of his old happiness. *Make me to hear joy and gladness*, he asks, *that the bones which thou hast crushed may rejoice*. What the 'crushed bones' mean exactly, we will consider in chap v. Suffice it to remark here that the message which will lift him up out of his misery, and restore to him joy and gladness is that of the forgiveness of his sins.

There are but few words in the first half of this psalm (verses 1-9) which we cannot apply first of all to England as a Christian nation, and next to ourselves individually. The 4th verse may indeed be beyond us. It is only the Jewish Church-nation which could truthfully say, 'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.' Poor, despised, and oppressed Israel was physically unable to violate human rights. I fear, I greatly fear, that we English dare not claim never to have acted unjustly towards other nations. Not only for our national vices, which the psalmist might regard as offences against God alone, but also for many an oppressive act towards weaker and dependent races, we need to humble ourselves in the dust before the God alike of the weak and of the strong. When God wills, He puts the trumpet into

the hand of a prophet such as Clarkson or Wilberforce, and to-day I feel that I must add the name of Lowell,¹ whose voice helped so much to animate the American people to the great deed of the abolition of negro-slavery. At present we may perhaps complain with the psalmist, 'We see not our signs ; there is no more any prophet.' But we may at least anticipate the prophet's coming, and seek by God's grace to set in order the things that are wanting in our Israel. And in order to correct the nation, let each of us be more earnest in correcting himself. Where would crime be, if we had each a proper sense of sin ? It is no doubt the work of the Holy Spirit to give us this. But the Spirit loves to work through the appointed means, and the oldest and, must we not say ? the greatest, of these means is the Scripture. He who would live like the psalmists must study the psalmists' words. And where should they be studied more than in our cathedrals, which are as it were fountains of psalmody ? With all modern helps, and in the fearlessness of the love of truth, let us pass through the portals of a faithful interpretation of the letter to the high and heavenly truth enshrined within. O God of Revelation ! we believe that there is still more light and truth to break forth out of Thy word.

¹ This sermon was preached after Lowell's death, Aug., 1891.

Speak to us through the words of Thy psalmists, we beseech Thee ! Fill us with Thy Spirit, that we may be led into the knowledge and practice of all the truth !

CHAPTER V.

PSALM LI. (*concluded*).

Ps. li. 10.—*Make me to hear joy and gladness,
That the bones which thou hast crushed may
rejoice.*

THAT is a pathetic saying over which we came to a pause—‘that the bones which thou hast crushed may rejoice.’ The ‘crushing’ spoken of is by no means only a figure for deep grief of mind ; it is meant as a literal description of the condition of Israel. Israel, being a living organism, with stages in its life comparable to those of infancy and manhood, must be liable to similar misfortunes to those of an individual, and one of these had actually befallen it when this psalm was written. Persia was not always so mild and gentle to the Jews as in the time of Cyrus ; and the psalmist now tells us that the ‘bones’—i.e. the framework of society¹—have

¹ See Ezek. xxxvii. 1-10.

been lately crushed beyond recognition in the remorseless grip of Persian oppressors. He is beset by a sickening fear of what the next hour may bring forth. Israel seems 'at the point to die,' and the psalmist 'suffers God's terrors with a troubled mind.'¹ Another psalmist, writing in Israel's name at the same or at a similar period, says ²—

*Have pity upon me, Jehovah ; for I am languishing :
Heal me, Jehovah ; for my bones are vexed.
For in Death there is no mention of thee ;
In Sheól who will give thee thanks ?*

Our own psalmist indeed is too earnest a believer to look only upon the dark side of Israel's experiences ; is it not Jehovah who 'createth evil' ?³ 'My bones which *thou* hast crushed,' he says, and he derives some comfort from the thought. But, alas ! there is something else broken besides 'bones.' If only the framework of society were crushed, there might still be hope, but the very citadel of life has been touched ; there is a 'broken spirit,' a 'broken and crushed heart.'⁴ The psalmist does not mention this till the end of the psalm, but we must refer to it now because it helps to account for ver. 12—

¹ Ps. vi. 2, 4.

² Ps. lxxxviii. 15 (Prayer Book).

³ Isa. xlv. 7.

⁴ 'Heart' of a nation, as in Isa. i. 5, vi. 10, 1 Kings xviii. 37, &c.

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a firm spirit within me ;*

that is, Give me a new and clean heart and a firm spirit in return for those broken ones which I would fain sacrifice to thee.

There is no greater saying than this in the Old Testament—‘Create in me a clean heart, O God.’ It is suggested no doubt by passages of Jeremiah, the prophet of the ‘new covenant,’ and of Ezekiel, and of the Second Isaiah;¹ but it has a special greatness of its own because it is the utterance of the whole Church-nation. Jeremiah planted, Ezekiel watered, and in His own good time God gave the increase. But how does this petition lead on to the next, *Cast me not away from thy presence?* This phrase too has a history. What it still meant long after the time of David we see from 2 Kings xxiv. 20, *For through the anger of Jehovah did it come to pass* (i.e. all the trouble of Zedekiah’s reign) *in Jerusalem and Judah, until he had cast them out from his presence.*² Here the word ‘presence’ has of course a purely local reference. To the early Israelites

¹ 1 Sam. x. 6 is of course not parallel. But see Jer. xxxi. 33, xxxii. 39; Ezek. xi. 19, xviii. 31, xxxvi. 26, Isa. xlv. 3. (The Second Isaiah represents the new creation as a spiritualization of the old one, for Israel was ‘formed from the womb,’ &c., Isa. xliii. 3.) Comp. Ps. xxii. 31, cii. 19.

² Parallel passages, 2 Kings xiii. 23 (end), xxiv. 3.

Canaan was very much like what Paradise was, according to the allegoric narrative, to Adam and Eve; it was not only *their* home, but Jehovah's. To be cast out of Palestine was therefore to be cast out of Jehovah's house.¹ But to the Church-nation, formed after the return from Babylon, a fuller insight into the truth was vouchsafed. Not the land of Canaan, but the temple, was the place where Jehovah's presence was to be enjoyed; and the nobler psalmists certainly felt more or less distinctly that His presence in the temple was sacramental, and only enjoyed by the pure and upright in heart. The consequence was that the phrase 'to be cast away from God's presence' acquired a new and deeper significance; it meant henceforth for each believer who used it to enjoy the conscious experience of the divine favour, not only outwardly but inwardly, not only as a member of the Church-nation, but as an individual.

And now do we not see the connexion of verses 10 and 11? Must it not be this? 'Give me a clean heart, O God, for this will bring me near to Thee, and (to quote from Ps. lxxiii. 28) nearness to God is my joy.' And how shall such a gift and such a station be preserved? Not by any self-reliant resolutions on Israel's part, but by the Holy Spirit within

¹ In Hos. viii. 1 the land of Israel is actually called the 'house of Jehovah.'

the Church-nation, according to that saying of penitent and afflicted Israel in the Second Isaiah, ‘*Where is he that put his Holy Spirit in the midst of it*’ (i.e. of Israel)?¹ For although there was as yet no theological doctrine of persons within the God-head, yet God’s gracious influences were already traced to an objective Cause, which was sometimes conceived of as personal, and this personal Cause was from the close of the Captivity onwards believed (not without the best of reasons) to be closely associated with the Church-nation. Israel as a people was being directed and as a Church was being morally educated by the Divine or (as it is called only here and in Isa. lxiii. 10, 11) the Holy Spirit. How remote all this is from the David of the Book of Samuel (who sought counsel of Jehovah by material objects like the Urim and Thummim²), and how near spiritually to the Gospel of the grace of God!

Take not, therefore, thy Holy Spirit from me, prays the Church-nation. And since the Divine Spirit within God’s people manifests Himself in many forms (six are mentioned by Isaiah³), our psalmist specifies two of these—a firm (or constant) spirit in

¹ Isa. lxiii. 11 (in a probably post-Exilic section).

² The Targum interprets ‘holy spirit’ here of the spirit of prophecy. But how different was prophecy in David’s age from the lofty inspiration which the Targumist has in view!

³ Isa. xi. 2.

ver. 10, and a willing spirit (i.e. a spirit of zeal in God's service) in ver. 13, as gifts chiefly to be desired for Israel. But does he forget that God Himself must still work on behalf of His people, and that no vessel can be filled so full of His grace as to satisfy the needs of the Church? Oh, no. What would life be, if God never interposed specially, surpassing the deeds of the very noblest of His servants, according to that saying of the psalmist, 'who alone doeth great wonders'?¹ And this is why, between the three petitions for spiritual influences, we find two inserted which relate to the immediate operation of God through the Angel of His Presence.² One is, *Cast me not away from thy presence* (i.e. Let not thine Angel cast me away from Himself), and the other, which forms a vigorous antithesis to the first, *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation*. Beautiful words! How much they symbolize to the mature Christian! They speak of joy victorious over grief in the power of the Crucified One, 'who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,'³ that all future cross-bearers might enter into His joy. But turn back a few miles in the path of human experience, and see the tiny child (if one may draw an image from Blake's lovely lyric) Infant Joy. It has no doubt spiritual qualities, but traces of its material origin

¹ Ps. cxxxvi. 4.² Isa. lxiii. 9.³ Heb. xii. 2.

are still visible enough. It is spiritual, I say ; we must not disparage the holy psalmists by denying this. *Thou hast put gladness in my heart*, says one of them, *more than they have when their corn and their wine are increased.*¹ But it has still a tinge of earthliness, and we sympathize all the more with those whom it gladdened, knowing our own weakness. For salvation in Hebrew meant originally ‘victory’ (regarded as a deliverance), as when in the 20th psalm the worshippers address God’s Anointed with the words, *We will shout for joy at thy salvation.*² When David laid the giant low the Israelites, we are told, shouted.³ It is a joy as exulting as this that the psalmist anticipates, when all Israel’s foes shall have been overthrown by the Angel of Jehovah’s Presence. But the foes of whom he thinks are not only Persian oppressors but those known and unknown sins which, he believes, have brought the present sad troubles upon Israel.

But with what object does Israel seek this ‘salvation’ from outward and inward foes? If his idea of ‘salvation’ is mixed, may there not be a tinge of selfishness in his motives? No ; so far as the 51st and other psalms are authorities, his intention is pure. What he seeks is, in the language of our collect, ‘to serve the Lord in all godly quietness ;’

¹ Ps. iv. 7.² Ps. xx. v.³ 1 Sam. xv. 52.

he needs deliverance from outward foes in order to devote himself to his special work in the world. We know what that is from the Second Isaiah. The regenerate Israel is to be in some sense a missionary people; he is to 'bring forth judgment' (i.e. true religion) 'to the Gentiles.'¹ He has but a vague idea how this is to be done, and feels that he must himself be taught God's ways more perfectly² before he can properly teach them to others. But he will not refuse to make the attempt. And he will begin with the sinners and transgressors of his own people, in accordance with the ideal of the Lord's Servant sketched in the Second Isaiah. Therefore, relying on the longed-for gifts of the Spirit and 'hot,' as Bishop Fisher of Rochester says, 'with the fire of charity,' he exclaims,

*Then will I teach transgressors thy ways,
And sinners shall return unto thee.*

Let us pause here a moment. It is one's duty seriously to ask the question, Can these words possibly have been written by David after his interview with Nathan, as the heading, which is no part of sacred Scripture, supposes? To decide this point we must refer to the sequel of the Uriah-narrative, 2 Sam. xii. 26-31 (see p. 33), which at any rate

¹ Isa. xlii. 1.

² See Ps. xxv. 4, 5, xxvii. 11, lxxxvi. 11, cxix. 12, 26 &c., cxliii. 10.

shows that the thoughts which David had after his repentance were very different from those of the psalmist. Nor can we safely stop here. It is well to be loyal to one of the greatest of our Lord's ancestors, but not at the expense of truth. There is no period in the historical life of David at which 'rivers of water ran down his eyes because men kept not God's law.'¹ And is it at all more conceivable that he wrote the 14th verse of our psalm? Supposing that he did express his lively penitence in the form of a psalm, can he have omitted to refer to his miserable treatment of the noble Uriah till the last verse but three, and then only alluded to it in the vague words, *Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, thou God of my salvation?*²

But, the Bible-reader will ask, What does the psalmist refer to in this line, if not to some act of murder committed by himself which weighs like lead upon his conscience? The question is a reasonable one; a psalm in such familiar use as the 51st should

¹ Ps. cxix. 136. Mr. Mozley, it is true, quotes 1 Sam. xvii. 46, 'that all the earth may know that Israel hath (indeed) a God' (*David in the Psalms*, p. 35). But this is from a non-critical point of view.

² The only answer I can think of is this—that Nathan himself (see his parable) was more shocked by David's act of adultery than by his deed of blood (so common were assassinations in those fierce times). But if Nathan under-estimated the guilt of murder, I am sure that David felt the villany of all the parts of his sin. One cannot mistrust one's instinct on such a point. I am sure too that if David had alluded to his murder at all, he would have done so in clear terms.

be clearly understood in all its parts. And the answer is that murder—the besetting sin of hot-blooded natures—was very prevalent in ancient Israel,¹ and that if the Church-nation is the speaker, it is all the accumulated murders of past years that are referred to, since those of the heathenish king Manasseh, of which we are told that God *removed Judah out of his presence, for the innocent blood which Manasseh shed ; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood : and Jehovah would not pardon.*² Let us then turn to those Old Testament writers who lived after the great removal spoken of—the Babylonian Captivity. The bloodshed of Jerusalem had been ‘purged from the midst thereof,’ according to the word of Isaiah,³ ‘by a blast of judgment’; but was the old Semitic fierceness also purged away? If we can show that this was not entirely the case even at the time when the Church-psalms were written, we shall be able to account for the prayer, *Deliver me from bloodshed, O God*, without supposing a reference to any single notorious act of an individual.

The most remarkable passage in the later Scrip-

¹ How much more prevalent it must have been among the ancestors of the Israelites we may guess from the actual condition of the Arabian nomads. ‘Bloodguiltiness,’ says Mr. Doughty, ‘they think to be a [mere] misfortune in one’s life’ (*A.D.*, ii. 444).

² 2 Kings xxiv. 3, 4; cf. Ezek. vii. 23, xxii. 2-4. See also Matt. xxiii. 34, 35.

³ Isa. iv. 4.

tures bearing on this subject is in the Second Isaiah. In Isa. lix. 3 we read, *For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity*; and again in ver. 7, *Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands*. And in ver. 11 the Jewish Church complains, *We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment* (a judgment of God in our favour), *but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us*. The whole chapter is a commentary on the 51st psalm; the circumstances presupposed, and the tone of the prophet, and of the Church which at ver. 9 becomes the speaker, strikingly resemble those of the psalmist. But the Psalter itself contains numerous references to the shedding of innocent blood within the Church-nation. I will only mention three. In Ps. lix. 2 a psalmist prays, *Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from the bloodthirsty men*. Another temple singer, in Ps. cxxxix. 19, exclaims,

*O that thou wouldst slay the ungodly, O God,
And that men of blood would depart from me.*

And in Ps. xxvi. we read (ver. 9),—

*Take not away my soul with sinners,
Nor my life with men of blood.*

Clearly, then, it is only too natural for the psalmist, speaking in the name of the Church, to use the peti-

tion in the 14th verse of our psalm. He regards the recent calamity as the punishment of the national sins, chief among which is that of murder. So he first of all asks in Israel's name for forgiveness and regeneration, and then to be 'delivered from bloodshed,' i.e. primarily, from the punishment of bloodshed.¹ In the parallel line he adds, *And my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness*, righteousness being the divine attribute specially concerned with deliverance from trouble. Thus there are two motives for his last request. He desires 1. that he may have leisure to teach God's ways to transgressors, and 2. that he may be able to take part worthily in the temple thanksgivings. The first reason has been given already in ver. 13; the second is new, and may be illustrated by Ps. xxvi. 6, 7, where the speaker vows to 'wash his hands in innocency,' i.e. to keep himself free from sins of violence, that he may 'compass God's altar' and 'make the voice of thanksgiving to be heard.' Our own psalmist continues,

O Lord, open thou my lips (closed at present by my trouble),

And my mouth shall show forth thy praise.

¹ The psalmist chooses his words carefully. He does not say '*purify me*,' but '*deliver me*'; punishment is 'like a net' (Ps. xxv. 15; Isa. li. 20). When 'deliver' or some synonymous word is used, 'from my transgressions' (or the like) means 'from my punishment,' at least inclusively. See Ps. xxv. 22, xxxix. 8, cxxx. 8, Isa. lxiv. 5.

Obedience doubtless comes before praise. It was obedience, as Jeremiah tells us,¹ not burnt offerings or sacrifices, of which Jehovah spake of old unto the fathers, but the praiseful temper is the aromatic odour which should accompany obedience, and which makes it well pleasing to God. And therefore, as the reason why the speaker now promises to shew forth God's praise, he adds in ver. 16,

For thou delightest not in sacrifice, that I should give it :

Thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering.

This is a very strong statement, and it shows that God permits many things in His Church which are very far from ideal. This at least it is our duty to say ; but we are not bound to turn iconoclasts, any more than the psalmist felt bound to fulminate against the sacrificial laws. We are not bound to destroy works of art in our churches, even if we do not think them conducive to edification, as long as the Church permits and encourages us to hold and to teach spiritual religion. Our psalmist evidently feels this. He has lost the sense of sin and of separation from God, and is confident that the national calamity which has so distressed him will be either removed altogether, or so mitigated as to be no great hindrance to Israel's spiritual work. It is upon that work that

¹ Jer. vii. 22.

his last thoughts in this psalm are concentrated. The right doctrine of sacrifice is one of the chief truths which he will teach transgressors. The sacrifices of God, what are they? And the answer echoes to us still from the far-off times of the Second Temple,

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit :

A broken and crushed (or, contrite) heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Let us pause here a moment again. Does this definition quite agree with what we read in Psalms xl. and l.¹ where obedience and praise are specified as the sacrifices acceptable to God? No; but I suppose that it is not a complete definition. It is implied in verse 15 that grateful praise is also one of God's sacrifices, though, strictly speaking, no man by his own unassisted efforts can offer it aright. All that poor weak human nature can present to God is the expression of its own miserable state, and its only altar (as a Jewish hymn finely says) is formed out of the fragments of a broken heart. How can I help at once applying this to ourselves? 'Thou wilt not despise.' Did ever man speak like this man, till the Master who said, *Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out?* God loves that which the world would think least desirable. Heaven is for those who have failed upon earth, says a mocking proverb. We

¹ Ps. xl. 6, l. 14, 23.

accept the augury, and confess that having failed to do anything worth doing in our own strength, we bring our failures to Him who can turn them into victories. We would far rather 'lie at the threshold of the house of our God than dwell in the tents of ungodliness.'¹ The blessed sense of forgiveness gives us not only a comfort but an inward strength which is more than a compensation for a 'broken heart.'

The last two verses have no very close connexion with what precedes, and are best regarded as an appendix added (perhaps very soon) by a different writer.² 'Spiritual duties and blessings give place to

¹ Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

² No peculiarity of language enforces this view, but the delicacies of exegesis are effaced, as it seems to me, if we deny this. The preoccupation of the writer of vv. 1-17 is the forgiveness of his (or rather Israel's) sins; that of the writer of vv. 18 and 19, the rebuilding of the walls and the re-establishment of the sacrificial system. The one is penetrated with the ideas of Jeremiah (vii. 22, 23, xxxi. 33, 34); the other virtually says, No perfect human worship without the Levitical sacrifices, but also, No perfect sacrifice without the oblation of an obedient heart. Verses 18 and 19 may be viewed as a substitute for the joyous chorus which is appended to Ps. xxxii. They *need not* have been added *long after* the composition of the psalms. It has been objected to the theory here adopted that Ps. li. 17 would form too abrupt a conclusion for the psalm, and that after vv. 14 and 15 we expect the notes of song to die away with a cry of joy. But why should not the psalmist close with the verse which contains his special contribution to the doctrine of sacrifice? I have pointed out elsewhere that there is a beautiful progress of ideas in the three kindred psalms, xl., l., and li. 'The first merely says, Obedience is better than sacrifice; the second adds that prayer and thanksgiving are essential to true worship; the third, that, since Israel and each Israelite are sinners, they must be forgiven before they can obey or praise, and that God will forgive them, not for sacrifices, but

Jerusalem and the temple, the disciple of the Second Isaiah to the earnest fellow-worker of Ezra and Nehemiah. The community has to be built up ; it needs walls and a systematized ritual.' Let not the friend of prophets and psalmists despise the sober practical reformer. There may be great differences in functions, and in the way of regarding divine truth, but it is the same Spirit who worketh all in all, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is both liberty and unity.

Such is the 51st psalm to those who, out of reverence for historical truth, are compelled to reject the conventional explanation. It belongs first of all to the Church in the widest sense of the word, and next to the individual in so far as he is a true Churchman. More especially should it be dear to those who look forward with hope to what Milton described as a 'new reformation.' Standing almost at the edge of the 19th century, we are called upon to take our share in the creation of a new England. 'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,' and it depends upon us whether the new shall be better

for heartfelt repentance' (*The Book of Psalms*, 1888, p. 144). Observe that Ps. l. closes in the same style with a declaration on sacrifice ('Whoso sacrificeth thanksgiving, glorifieth me'). And if the psalmist's tone is subdued, is there not an undertone of penitence in Christian praises? The *Te Deum* closes with 'Let me never be confounded.' If Ps. li., as has been said, anticipates St. Augustine, why should it not close with humble contrition?

or worse than the old. Or rather, it depends upon us as 'workers together with God.' And in order that the new England may be produced, and may correspond in some measure to the divine ideal, we, God's human agents, must ourselves be 'renewed in the spirit of our mind.' What then is the first step towards this renewal? The 51st psalm will tell us:—it is the breaking of the proud natural heart which claims to be good enough, wise enough, strong enough, to rectify all wrongs, to solve all problems, to conquer all enemies. He who would be 'filled unto all the fulness of God'¹ must first be emptied of all the insufficiency of man. It is a defect of the finest of those eloquent passages in which Milton anticipates the new reformation that, too forgetful of human weakness, he represents England as a Samson awaking out of his sleep, and shaking his invincible locks. Alas! *that* ambition 'o'erleap'd itself.' England was taken captive by spiritual foes worse far than the Philistines, and her blind poet learned to sympathize with defeated Samson,

' In darkness, and with dangers compass'd round,
And solitude.'²

Not to Samson will we compare the band of Christian reformers in Church and State whom we see rising

¹ Eph. iii. 19, R.V.

² *Paradise Lost*, vii. 27.

up among us, but to David the shepherd-boy meeting the Philistine giant in the power of a humble but invincible faith. Or, to return to Milton's circle of ideas, who was thinking in the first instance of a great religious movement, may we not say that the spirit of the new reformation should be the same which characterized the old? Milton may have forgotten it, but it is none the less true that the spirit of Luther was profoundly penitential in the psalmist's sense, i.e. full of self-distrust and jubilant reliance upon God's promises. There was wisdom in the counsel of that too despondent bishop who at the beginning of Luther's career bade him go back and repeat the 51st psalm. Luther did repeat that psalm again and again, not however as a psalm of despair, but of boundless hope. And however mistaken in some points, he is worthy to be followed in this. No one ever regretted giving anything to God, even if it were but a broken heart. Every sacrifice which we make to God is more than compensated to us by the richest heavenly gifts. And this is true not only of the individual but of each little band of fellow-workers. Let but the spirit of supplication come upon 'two or three' brothers in soul, and break their hearts in true penitence, and 'prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows

of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.'¹ And how much more will God's royal munificence exhibit itself to his Bride the Church, if she do but wait upon Him with broken heart and united intercessions! For then surely will that beautiful promise be fulfilled, *I will give them one heart.*² Ah, what might not be done in England by a united Christian Church, of which it could be said, as of the first disciples, *And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul!*³ Then we might venture to hope that England's Church might become conterminous with the nation, and that the privilege coveted for England by Milton might at length be granted her, of teaching the nations how to live. Let us then seek to unite more with our neighbours both in prayer and in work. So shall we enter more into the spirit of the psalms; so may we trust that the Holy Spirit will not only not be taken from us, but may come from heaven as with a 'rushing mighty wind,' filling the whole house (our England) in which we dwell, and transforming each of us into living vessels of His flame-like energy.

¹ Mal. iii. 10.² Jer. xxxii. 39.³ Acts ii. 2.

CHAPTER VI.

PSALM XXXII.

THIS 32nd psalm was the favourite of two great men, who, different as they were, agreed in their deep sense of sin and their exaltation of grace—St. Augustine and Martin Luther. It was their favourite, because it was one of the penitential psalms, and both of them had learned the sweetness and the bliss of repentance, which, in its purest and truest form, is ‘the eager and enthusiastic struggle of the soul to reach and fasten itself to God.’¹ Both of them have, not only blistered this psalm with their tears, but tried to sing it to the bright allegro music which they overheard from the angels’ harps. How could they sing the penitential psalms to doleful chants when they had caught sweet fragments of the angelic melodies? For ‘*there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*’

¹ Right Rev. Phillips Brooks.

But St. Augustine and Luther are not the only noted persons who have loved this psalm. God's word is like the sword at the garden of Eden; it turns every way, and sometimes pierces where you would least expect it. As if to show that the most frivolous follies do not shut out heaven-sent glimpses of the deeper and more serious side of life, this psalm was also a favourite with Diana of Poitiers,¹ whose name has such a doubtful sound in French history. No one who has used this psalm for himself can afford to be a Pharisee, and look down on those who travel in the miry ways of the world. God may see many latent possibilities of good in those of whom we are tempted to despair, and a work of grace may be going on in the soul which some providential event may suddenly bring to a surprising maturity. It would be no kindness to condone the vices of worldlings, but our Saviour teaches us to be as hopeful as we can, and to divide mankind not into the saved and the unsaved, but into the children who live in the home-like sense of God's fatherhood, and those who, through ignorance or folly, have wandered away into a far land.

Yes; those who seem to be at the top of human

¹ On the remarkable popularity of the Huguenot Psalter, see Henry's *Leben Johann Calvins*, ii. 161. The gentlemen and ladies of the court had each their favourite psalms (even Queen Catherine de Medicis).

happiness are not on this account to be congratulated. You know that fine old English poem of Sir Henry Wotton's, called 'The Character of a Happy Life.' Well, the psalmist here tells us how *he* would describe this character. All men seek happiness ; but the only durable happiness is that of the truly righteous, that is, of the forgiven man. Loud as are the songs in the houses of luxury, there are carols whose note of joy is purer and deeper.

*'Be joyful in Jehovah, and exult, ye righteous' ; for
 ' happy are ye, whose transgressions are forgiven,
 and whose sins are covered.'*

How full of meaning are these verses when taken together ! How far they soar above the melancholy and incomplete wisdom of Ecclesiastes ! 'Weary of earth and laden with (his) sin,' the wise man wrote the results of his sad experience, and among them he mentions this—that 'there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not' (Eccles. vii. 20). It is true, the author of the 14th psalm had said so before ; but then the psalmists and prophets belong to the little flock of those who have given up all for God, and who are sometimes thought to be too severe on those who still cling to worldly pleasures. To the testimony of Ecclesiastes no exception can be taken. He had tried the world, and found that, in his experience, the few good men

were absolutely lost among the crowd of bad. ‘*One man among a thousand have I found*’ (Eccles. vii. 28). He does not tell us what this rare product of humanity was like. I think I can supply his omission. If this ‘one man’ really kept his head above the tide of wickedness in the age of Ecclesiastes, it was not as a product of humanity that he did so, but as a penitent and forgiven sinner. He was like the author of the 32nd psalm, who had not indeed escaped sin, but who had taken his sin direct to God for forgiveness. The psalmist too has written down his impressions, and they are more satisfactory, though less copious, than those of Ecclesiastes. Shall we study them together for a few minutes?

It is clear that some grievous trouble had befallen the psalmist, and clear too that even if he speaks for himself primarily, he thinks also of all who are in the same distressed condition. His trouble is produced by his profound sympathy with the calamity which has come upon Israel; he may indeed be, not indeed David, but the spiritual head of the Church-nation. If he is not contemporary with the author of Ps. li., he belongs at any rate to the same circle of inspired thinkers and poets. Now let us study his experiences. There are two different effects of trouble. Either it makes us trust God all the more, according to that fine saying, ‘*Though he slay me, yet*

will I trust in him.'¹ This effect however it can only produce if the set of the will and the affections is towards God and the moral law. Or it reveals to us the dreadful fact that we do not love God, and so becomes to us the punishment of our rebellion. The psalmist's trouble at first produced this latter result. He tells us that he could do nothing but cry out all day long, 'Oh, how cruel God is!' He thought: 'Great plagues may be proper for the ungodly, but I am not one of that class. I have been constantly to Jehovah's temple; I have punctually brought my sacrifices; I have given tithes of my corn, my wine, and my oil; and this is all the return that I get!' He did *not* say this; for he may have remembered that verse of Job,—

'Why dost thou strive against him?

For he giveth not account of any of his matters' (Job xxxiii. 13).

You see, he could not frame his lips to prayer; but at least he would not blaspheme. He had no true love of God, but he felt at times that after all he might be misapprehending his Maker. And so perhaps this unspoken prayer went up—you will find it in the same book of Job—'*Show me wherefore thou contendest with me*' (Job x. 2). And imme-

¹ Job xiii. 15, A.V.; it is an erroneous version, however (see *Var. Bible*).

diately the prayer was answered. Was it by the help of a prophet that the sufferer found out his unrepented sin? or was it the imperious voice of conscience which at last made itself heard? The former is the old but uncritical view adopted by Robert Burns in that truly sacred poem, 'The Cottar's Saturday Night,'—

‘Or how the royal bard did groaning lie
Beneath the stroke o’ Heaven’s avenging ire.’

I prefer the latter, because it is the most natural, and suits the words of the psalm best. Surely there is nothing kept back; the psalmist tells us the whole history of his repentance: .

‘I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity I covered not ;

*I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah,
And so thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.’*

Now let us try to understand the psalmist. How did he know that God had forgiven his sin? He says nothing about sacrifices. I suspect that he felt at this moment as all men who are deeply concerned about their souls must feel, that no ritual performance as such could have any real effect upon God; that he must throw himself absolutely upon God’s mercy, trusting simply and solely in His pardoning love. But even then, how could he know that God had

pardoned him? Perhaps he felt it, you may say; but how could he trust his feelings? I am certain that no ancient Israelite would have trusted his feelings. ‘*The Jews require a sign,*’ says St. Paul (1 Cor. i. 22); and this expresses a characteristic quality of the Jewish nation. The Apostle Thomas was a typical Israelite. The sceptical spirit, which had been modified in the other apostles, seems to have existed in him in all its original force. The psalmist must have required a sign that his transgression was really forgiven, and his sin covered. Well, there can hardly be a doubt as to what that sign was. It was the removal of that outward misfortune which had first led him to think that he had sinned. There is nothing more pathetic than the limited views which many of the best of the Israelites entertained even down to our Lord’s time. They could not conceive of trouble as intended to deepen and purify their love to God; and so, when trouble came, they at once leaped to the conclusion that God was angry with them. I call it pathetic, because being such earnest, devout men, it seems as though they ought to have been taught better. But who was there to teach them? One can blame the Roman missionary in the Northumbrian kingdom for letting the noble Edwin form such an imperfect conception of the Gospel as this—that it would necessarily lead those who em-

braced it to earthly prosperity : a mistake fatally avenged on the field of Hatfield Chace. But whom are we to blame for the mistakes of the psalmists and prophets ? How many were there competent to teach them better ?

So then the sign which this pious Israelite, and those who suffered like him, desired was the restoration of earthly prosperity ; and a merciful God granted it. There *are* such things as answers to prayer, whatever sceptical men of science may think ; and though prayers for spiritual are safer than those for temporal blessings, yet even these latter are for wise and gracious reasons very often heard. It was so in the case of the penitent sinner who wrote this psalm. God dealt tenderly with His servant, and would not shake his new-born faith by leaving him in his distress.

But will any of *us* try to bargain with God, and offer to believe in the forgiveness of our sins, if God will also take away all the impediments to our earthly happiness ? Surely not. That were to doubt God's love, and to set up our wisdom against His ; that were to compare two classes of good things which are by their nature wholly incommensurable. The sign of a spiritual blessing must itself be spiritual. Need I say what the true sign is ? Listen to St. Paul. *'There is therefore now no condemnation to them that*

are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death' (Rom. viii. 1, 2, R.V.). That is, if you have been forgiven through Christ Jesus, you have also received the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. There is no arbitrary connexion in this case between the sign and that of which it is the evidence. Because Christ died, not merely to obtain our forgiveness, and restore us to infant innocence, but to mould us into His own likeness, qualify us to be fellow workers with Himself in God's kingdom. Neither is any mistake about this sign possible. A young Christian may stumble very often, but no one who observes him closely can mistake the direction in which he is walking. In private, he will be seen to court solitude, to read his Bible, and to pray; in public, to avoid those sins to which, before he made his baptismal vow a reality, he was specially prone, and to cultivate those Christian graces the most which are least congenial to his temperament. There will be a growing earnestness in his manner, a growing conscientiousness in his work, and a growing spirituality in his use of forms, especially of the most sacred and best beloved of all forms, which will mark him off at once from those who have missed the happiness of coming to Jesus for what He alone can give.

But note the beautiful inconsistency of the psalmist. He believes that even in this life the good are always rewarded, and the bad punished. '*Great plagues,*' he says, '*remain for the ungodly, but whoso trusteth in Jehovah, lovingkindness embraceth him on every side.*' But he also quotes one of the loveliest promises in the Old Testament—I say, he quotes it, because beyond doubt it was in a special sense a revelation to him.

'I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way thou art to go ;

I will give thee counsel, (keeping) mine eye upon thee.'

So that, you see, the psalmist was not merely anxious for temporal deliverance ; he longed for trustworthy moral guidance, and the sense of God's constant protection. Perhaps indeed one may say that though, in deference to the orthodoxy of his time, he gives the chief prominence to an earthly sign of forgiveness, yet in reality, in his heart of hearts, he longs most for the spiritual sign of intimate communion with God.

Last of all, observe the psalmist's grateful comment in verse 6 :

'For this let every one that is godly pray unto thee in time of distress,

When the flood of the great waters is heard ;

Unto such an one they shall not reach.'

What does *this* mean? Well, the psalmists delight in picture-speech, and 'great waters' are the symbol of a great trouble.

'Save me, O God, for the waters are come in even unto the life.'

And again, 'All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.'

Now does the writer mean that in really great personal sorrows the only true comfort is in prayer? I do not think he meant only this. If you look at the passages in which this figurative language is used, you will find that the troubles chiefly referred to as 'deep waters' are not personal and domestic ones, but those great calamities in which all the members of a nation participate. Doubtless the psalmists *had* personal joys and sorrows—they laughed at weddings, and they wept at funerals; but they did not make these the theme of song. How widely different in this respect are Christian hymns! Do I blame their writers? Not at all; the psalmists had such an absorbing interest in God's kingdom that it perhaps stunted other elements in their character not less worthy of being cultivated.

Still there is a bracing quality in the old Israelitish psalms, which contrasts happily with the softer, subjective element so conspicuous in Christian hymn-books; and this arises from the constant reference of

the psalms to the temporal and spiritual prospects of the Jewish Church and nation. If, then, we desire to taste the full sweetness of the psalms, we must first of all learn what the writers meant, and then apply this not merely to our own personal circumstances (which the words will not always fit), but to those of the universal Church and the English nation. The dangers we think of will be sometimes material, sometimes purely spiritual; for it may be said of bodies of men as well as of individuals, that their wrestling is not against flesh and blood. Is it not so? Do not the forces of evil sometimes almost seem to have a personal life, and to be fighting passionately against us? Then it is that the heart finds its way to its chosen psalms, 'as the warrior's hand to the hilt of his sword.' Luther was right in calling this and the companion-psalms the best. For him they were the best. And the missionaries of our own Church are right in going to the psalms for comfort in the moral wastes of Central Africa. 'But for the psalms of David and of Asaph,' said one of them in Uganda recently, 'I could not bear to see this all-but-omnipotent reign of evil!' But we need not go to Central Africa; evil is all too potent in our very midst. Let us fight against the evil in ourselves, and we shall have need enough of the psalms of David and of Asaph. We shall find out our own

special psalms, as Luther found out his. Only there is one verse which we shall *never* have occasion to use, ‘*Save me, O God, for the waters are come in even to the life.*’ For our ‘life is hid with Christ in God.’

CHAPTER VII.

PSALM VIII.¹

(With Note on Pss. viii., xxiii.)

ONE can perfectly sympathize with that ancient scribe who gave the heading to this psalm which assigns it to David. Has not its poetry a clear mark of an altogether exceptional genius? If the scribe could have compared this psalm with contemporary songs, Oriental or Greek, how he would have been struck by its moral superiority! In all ages, indeed, it has been difficult to infuse a moral meaning into a poem without spoiling it. But *our* poet, aided by that most delicate of artists, the Divine Wisdom,² has been easily successful. Can we wonder that this psalm was a favourite with the Lord Jesus, who quoted it at the climax of His history, and may have partly derived from it His best-loved title, 'the Son of man'; or that two of the greatest New Tes-

¹ On the period of this psalm, see *B.L.*, pp. 201, 464.

² Prov. viii. 30.

tament writers quoted it to justify their loftiest intuitions?¹ We must not, however, approach any Old Testament passage from the point of view of Christian applications of it. In our study of the Old Testament we must make but this one theological assumption: that Christ is not only the root of the new Israel but the flower of the old, and that the literature of the Jewish Church contains many a true germ of the truths of the gospel. Beautiful as mystical interpretations may often be, it is not wise to indulge in them, unless they are consistent with the original meaning which the writer himself put upon his words.

It is a hymn in three stanzas that we are about to study, with the two first lines repeated (in ver. 9) as a chorus,—

*'Jehovah our Lord,
How excellent is thy name in all the earth!'*

The three stanzas are vers. 1 and 2, 3-5, and 6-8. The first gives the occasion of the poem; the 'sweet psalmist' dedicates his powers to the glory of Him who is at once the God of Israel and of all nations, of man and of the universe. Like the author of the 103rd psalm, he looks upon man as the priest of nature, and in the abeyance of proper worship from the Gentiles, upon Israel as the priest of mankind.

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 27; Heb. ii. 8.

‘Jehovah our Lord,’ then, means ‘Jehovah, Lord of praiseful Israel, and of mute mankind.’ God in His lovingkindness chose the family of Abraham to set an example of that righteous way of life which He approves, but with the further object that in distant days all nations of the earth should ‘bless themselves by Abraham.’¹ But as yet few, if any, of the Gentiles ‘are joined unto the people of the God of Abraham.’² The restored exiles have no material strength; they are, as the psalms so often say, the ‘poor and afflicted,’ and the nations around are hostile to them, not out of pure spite, but because Jehovah’s religion is so unlike every other. ‘Thine adversaries,’ the psalmist calls them, and also ‘the enemy and the avenger’; or, to put it more clearly, ‘the self-avenger’ (i.e. the revengeful). How well one can understand this in the light of what we are told of Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite in the book of Nehemiah, and again of what we are told in Psalm lxxxiii. of the furious nations, whom ‘Asaph’ calls ‘thy (i.e. God’s) enemies,’ and whose desire was ‘that the name of Israel might be no more in remembrance’ (vers. 2, 4)!³ Against such foes what weapons had so small and weak a

¹ Gen. xviii. 18, 19.

² Ps. xlvii. 9, Prayer Book Version.

³ Note that the phrase, ‘Jehovah our Lord’ occurs in Nehemiah (x. 29), and that ‘our Lord’ = ‘Jehovah’ in Neh. viii. 10, cf. Ps. cxxxv. 5, cxlvii. 5.

people? None but the greatest of all. Do you guess what I mean? It is prayer; not only that kind of prayer which expresses itself in passionate cries for help—cries, like those in the 83rd psalm, but also, when Israel has had time to collect himself, the prayer which is transfigured into praise.¹

*'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou
established strength,
Because of thine adversaries,
That thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.'*

Need I justify myself for explaining the phrase 'babes and sucklings' of true believers (see p. 247), or remind you of that great saying of Christ, so thoroughly Old Testament-like in its expressions, which I have already quoted in connexion with the story of Goliath?² Indeed, the sense of the whole passage ought to be clear enough. It means that notes of praise in their clear and heavenly purity rise far above the harsh discords of earth, and reach the throne of God.³ There they become like the cherub on which the fancy of the olden time pictured Jehovah descending to fight for His people. A later psalmist of more spiritual imagination beautifully said that God 'inhabiteth the praises of Israel.'⁴ Another declared that praise was His favourite sacri-

¹ Ps. xlii. 8.

² Matt. xi. 25; cf. p. 75.

³ Cf. Lam. iii. 44.

⁴ Ps. xxii. 3.

fice,¹ and our present psalmist that the praises of the Church are like a tower of strength, from which He will invisibly issue forth to deliver His people. For who, if Israel be destroyed, will praise Him? ‘*Who will give thee thanks in the pit?*’² ‘*This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise.*’³

And what shall be the subject of Israel’s praise? Let another psalmist answer. ‘*Many, Jehovah, my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward.*’⁴ Israel will assuredly praise his God for the wonders of his history; but shall he be silent when he ‘considers’ the wonders of creation, especially the glorious ‘moon and stars’ of an eastern night, which give so deep a notion of infinity? You see that to this psalmist, as well as to the author of Psalm civ., the name Jehovah suggests, not what some might call a narrow, national idea, but the grand thought of the universe, heaven and earth, moon and stars, man and his willing subjects. ‘*How excellent is thy name!*’ But what, more precisely, do we mean by the ‘name’ of Jehovah? The divine name can neither be shut up in a word nor in a house. ‘Our Father’ can be worshipped by those who, like some theists in

¹ Ps. l. 14.² Ps. vi. 5.³ Isa. xliii. 21.⁴ Ps. xl. 5.

ancient and modern times, fear to name Him, and who have an almost morbid distaste for sacred places and liturgical forms. The 'name' of which the psalmists adoringly speak is that 'wonderful' and ineffable name, in which all the manifestations of Himself, which God either has granted or may grant are summed up. That great storehouse is like some mighty stream, from which millions of men can draw without exhausting it; save that the Nile and the Euphrates have but a provincial course, whereas Jehovah's name 'is excellent in all the earth.' Time was when a temple-poet could say, 'His name is great in Israel.'¹ But our psalmist can go beyond this; to praise Jehovah is the birthright of every child of man, seeing that he is also ideally a child of God.² The prayer, 'Hallowed be thy name,' shall one day be a reconciling force which shall 'make wars to cease unto the end of the earth.' Why not? Are not the prayers and praises of the Church the true cherubim? And must not Jehovah's manifestations of Himself in the future be as great as those in the past?

That some of these angels, as the psalmist might have called them, are on their way, we may learn from the second line of the first verse, '*Thou whose majesty is raised above* (see Septuagint) *the heavens.*'

¹ Ps. lxxv. 1.² Luke iii. 38.

The thought is the same as in that other song of creation—the 104th psalm (see vers. 1-3). There is a never-to-be-explored storehouse of divine glory above the heavens, where Jehovah invisibly sitteth, wrapped in light as in a mantle. No more than all that light which was created, according to a prose-poet, on the first day, was expended on the sun, the moon, and the stars, can the glory of Jehovah, whether in the natural or the spiritual sphere, have been as yet fully revealed. His mighty acts, not less than His tender mercies, ‘are new every morning,’¹ and there is the freshness of the morning dew upon each of His works. Yes; the saying, ‘There is nothing new under the sun,’ may be half true when applied to man’s works; it is altogether untrue when applied to God’s. Shall we not then resist those subtle influences which tend to impair the faculty of admiration, by which, in a certain sense, as Wordsworth says, ‘we live,’ not less than by hope and love? Shall we not seek to renew it, if it is impaired, and say, in the words of an Egyptian hymn, ‘O my God and Lord, who hast made me and formed me, give me an eye to see and an ear to hear thy glories?’² For if we are only able to perceive it,—

‘*Day unto day poureth out speech,
And night unto night sheweth forth knowledge*’ (Ps.
xix. 2).

¹ Lam. iii. 23.

² Renouf, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 126.

One of the greatest of the prophetic writers says, 'He wakeneth mine ear morning by morning' (Isa. l. 4). This openness of the inner eye and ear we call faith. That spiritually minded poet to whom I have just now referred assures us in Platonic style that every child has visions, denied to the grown man, of the heavenly palace from which he came, and bids us give thanks for those shadowy recollections which 'are the fountain light of all our day,' and are intimations of immortality. Let us follow him in his happy faith respecting those who in age are children : a faith which accords so well with the great Teacher's assurance of their nearness to the King of kings.¹ But let us not resign the hope that visions as glorious of their palace-home, and a resistance as absolute to the idea of death, may be granted to all those who are childlike in heart. For although it was of the children of a Jewish village that Jesus said, 'Their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven' (Matt. xviii. 10), yet is there any reason to think that God cherishes the ideal of a child of six more than the ideal of a child of sixty? What difference can fifty or sixty years make in God's estimate of us, as long as we are still 'following on to know Jehovah,' still improvable, still becoming a

¹ Matt. xviii. 10. The guardian angels are the divine ideals of the children.

little more idealized year by year? What is a guardian angel but an ideal which to God is real, and very near His heart?¹ Let us see to it that we keep God's ideal of our lives very close to us, and that we make progress in the language of childlike faith, which He so loves to hear. As the natural faculty of speech, quite apart from character, makes the poorest child more glorious than the whole of the mute creation, so the supernatural faculty of praise gives a glory to the meanest believer which the most intellectually gifted unspiritual person cannot possess. And this glory is the 'strength' or 'stronghold' of which the psalmist speaks, and which (according to the experience of the Jewish Church) can 'still the enemy and the revengeful.'

Paradoxical indeed it is that 'the weak things of the world' should thus claim the ability 'to confound the things which are mighty.'² But not more so than the theistic belief itself. No theism short of absolute trust in God is tolerable in the face of the

¹ The devout faith of the Old Testament writers is, that God has ever at hand a crowd of ideas and ideals, waiting to be realized in the world of humanity. The most important of these the later Jews called 'the seven holy angels which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One' (Tob. xii. 15; cf. Luke i. 19). But our Lord assures us that the ideal of each childlike soul is as near to His Father as the ideal, say, of a seventh part of the world. It is the glory of Jehovah to delight Himself equally in the greatest and in the seemingly smallest objects.

² 1 Cor. i. 27.

miseries of human life. Job had not this absolute trust, and so he turned the admiring exclamation of the psalmist in ver. 4 into food for his despairing pessimism.

'I loathe my life ; I would not live alway.

*What is frail man, that thou shouldest magnify him,
And that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him,
And that thou shouldest visit him every morning,
And try him every moment ?' ¹*

But to the psalmist it is a pleasure to live, even (it may be) in some part of the period of national decline. High thoughts of God have visited Israel in its humiliation. The more exalted Jehovah is seen to be, the greater becomes the wonder and the joy of His continual nearness to Israel. There is no greater marvel even to us than the success with which the Jewish saints have combined in their practical religion the idea of God's transcendence with that of His immanence. With such a God so near, so high and yet so lowly (the epithet is surely more suitable than 'condescending'), how can favoured man envy the state of angels?

'Thou madest him scarce less than angels,

¹ Job vii. 16-18. The date of the Book of Job is either Exilic or post-Exilic. Note that *'enōsh*, with the connotation of weakness, is characteristic of Job, Psalms, 2 Isaiah, and 2 Chron. There is a slight presumption therefore that these books are contemporary.

*And didst crown him with glory and honour ;
 Thou madest him to have dominion over the works
 of thy hands,
 Thou didst put all things under his feet.'*

But, again, how can these things be? For, as the earliest Christian commentator on the psalms has said, 'we see not yet all things put under him.'¹ Well, the psalmist doubtless alludes to the first chapter of Genesis, which is not indeed described as a vision, but is as much a vision as any poetic description of what is ideally, but not altogether really true, ever was. We need not be surprised that one of the temple-poets glides into the same style. In ver. 2, he is in the midst of the daily life of his people, and speaks of the spiritual 'stronghold' which Jehovah has granted to it. Then, being a special admirer of the first of the two primitive histories in Genesis, he throws himself into its idealizing mode of thought, and contemplates God's high purpose for man. But with the biblical writers the ideal is not 'baseless as the fabric of a vision' of the night; it is the prophecy of the real that shall be. St. Paul therefore rightly interprets our psalm² in the light of Isaiah xxv. 8, 'He hath swallowed up death for ever.' Death is the great hindrance to the realization of God's purpose for man, and death, according

¹ Heb. ii. 8.² 1 Cor. xv. 26, 27, 54.

to the unnamed prophet of the Jewish Church who wrote those words, is to be annihilated in the Messianic age. 'For behold,' as another glorious unnamed prophecy says, 'I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things (darkened as they were by the shadow of death) shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.'¹ And that scholar of St. Paul, though different in many ways from his master, who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, with not less substantial truth speaks of Jesus Christ as the Person who was for a little while made lower than the angels, and yet was Lord of all, because in Jesus the spiritual ideal of man is fully realized.² The psalmist does, in fact, look forward, not consciously to the coming of Jesus Christ, but to the realization of the human ideal through some mighty act of the Divine Spirit. He recapitulates the ancient charter of man's royal dignity, and refuses to admit a doubt as to man's ultimate assumption of his rights. So to think is to have a foretaste of future blessedness; so to trust is to be beyond the power of grief to sadden, or of trouble to cast down.

'What a piece of work is man!' exclaims Shakespeare. 'How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in appre-

¹ Isa. lxxv. 17.

² Heb. ii. 6-9

hension how like a god !' But who can say this unless he believes with our noble Milton that Time can take away nothing that is 'sincerely good and perfectly divine'? It remains true that only as we live in God have we the promise of realizing our ideals in a blessed immortality. Unless we can say the 16th psalm, the despairing question recurs in all its gloom,—

*'What man is he that shall live on and not see
death,
That shall deliver his soul from the hand of
Hades?'*

The charter of man's dignity is a dead letter to those who have no germs of the Christlike character.

*'Man that is in honour, but understandeth not,
Is like unto the beasts that perish.'*¹

Man is not only not above nature, apart from Christ, but among the weakest of nature's slaves. The beasts suffer less, the trees are more long-lived than he; civilization does but make him less independent, less easy to content. He cannot even comfort himself with his ideals, for what proof is there that they will ever be realized? A Jewish saint could only build up his faith on the intuitions of greater saints than he; a Christian saint can

¹ Ps. xlix. 20.

build up his upon facts — upon the facts of the historical revelation of God in Christ. Well may we Christians say, with a clearer consciousness of the meaning of the words than the psalmist can have enjoyed,

*‘What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
And the son of man, that thou visitest him?’*

NOTE ON PSALMS VIII., XXIII.

These psalms agree, not only in the smoothness of their style (which separates them from the psalms of persecution), but in the situation implied, which is that of one who has found ‘rest after toil, port after stormy seas.’ They differ in three respects,—1. Ps. viii. is avowedly a Church-psalm (see *vv.* 1, 9), while Ps. xxiii. is, at any rate at first sight, a psalm of the individual (but cf. ver. 6*b*); 2. Ps. viii. fixes the attention on the lordship and condescending graciousness of Jehovah, Ps. xxiii. on His ever-present guardianship, and 3. Ps. viii. is a contemplation of the works of God in creation, Ps. xxiii. of His providential dealings with His guarded one. The ascription of these psalms to David has taken hold of the popular fancy, and we often find them referred to as illustra-

tive of David's thoughts while tending his father's sheep at Bethlehem. Tholuck for instance, in his popular work on the Psalms, represents them as having been actually composed in these circumstances, though Mrs. Oliphant, while regarding them as 'doubtless the product of David's early thoughts and experiences,' leaves it uncertain whether they were 'produced then or in an after day.'¹ If indeed we apply to critics like Ewald and Hitzig, who were but half emancipated from the late Jewish tradition, we shall hear that Ps. viii. is more certainly Davidic than Ps. xxiii.; but probably most readers would far sooner yield up the former psalm than the latter. For while Ps. viii. is only marked out as the work of a shepherd, or of one who had been a shepherd, by the fact of its being a night-psalm (cf. Luke ii. 8), Ps. xxiii. draws its chief images directly from the pastoral life. Let us then mention, first of all, the two objections to the 'Davidic theory' which apply to both psalms equally. First, how unlike is the conception of Jehovah which they present to that found in that undoubtedly primitive Hebrew poem—the Song of Deborah. Some of the germs of that conception may indeed be traced in Judg. v., but how undeveloped they are! Secondly, how improbable

¹ *Jerusalem*, p. 9. Hengstenberg too thinks that David wrote these psalms after he had become king.

it is that a young shepherd-boy should have indited psalms like these ! As Hengstenberg says, 'Only the wine-press produces wine,' i.e. such psalms necessarily presuppose the mellowing influence of a long and varied career.

Let us next consider these psalms separately. Ps. viii. manifestly presupposes the existence of Gen. i. 1–ii. 4*a*. But this great section of the priestly narrative is at any rate post-Davidic. Ps. viii. also refers to true believing Israelites under the figure of 'little children and sucklings,' whereas David, even according to the less historical tradition, could 'play with lions as with kids' (Ecclus. xlv. 3). Ps. xxiii. is closely akin to Ps. xxvii. 1–6, and must belong to some part of the same period. Both poems express a love for the sanctuary, the intensity of which is inconceivable before the centralizing movement of Josiah. And though Delitzsch urges with justice that 'house' may be used in the sense of 'tent,' yet, unless compelled to do so by a convergence of other arguments, we have no right to explain the phrase, 'house of Jehovah' otherwise than we explain 'Jehovah's palace' (Ps. v. 8, and elsewhere), which *must* mean the temple at Jerusalem. The arguments *for* a late and presumably post-Exilic date are suggested by a faithful exegesis of the psalms, and by their affinities to other post-Davidic and (often) post-Exilic

works. Cf. *B.L.*, 201, 464 (for Ps. viii.), 236, 237, 272 (for Ps. xxiii.), and for the figure of Jehovah as the Shepherd and Teacher both of Israel and of each good Israelite, 343-348, 352.

I venture to add that this psalm-study first appeared long before Professor Kirkpatrick's commentary, which makes the same use of Wordsworth's great Ode on Immortality. The view here adopted on Ps. viii. 2 differs, however, from Professor Kirkpatrick's. A reflexion on the inarticulate testimony to the Creator borne by the weakness of natural infancy seems to me improbable in this context, and expressed in such an awkward form. Surely Ps. xliv. 16 is evidence of the original meaning of the verse, which, standing as it does in the midst of persecution-psalms, most naturally refers to the special circumstances of Jewish believers.

CHAPTER VIII.

PSALM XVI. ¹

(With Note on Ps. xvii. 15.)

I.

HERE is a psalm well worthy to be called, as the margin of King James's Bible translates the Jewish heading, a 'golden' psalm. Golden indeed it is; it belongs to that Bible within the Bible which the Christian instinct teaches all of us to rediscover for ourselves, and in which the New Testament writers took such keen delight. In childlike faith these holy men of old found their Saviour in the 16th psalm; and so may we, on the single condition that we do not disregard those laws of the human mind which God Himself made. Childlike faith must in

¹ On the period of Pss. xvi. and xvii., see *B.L.*, pp. 196-198, 226-229, and the linguistic argument, pp. 465, 466.

us be coupled with manly reasonableness. The first believers practically rewrote the Psalter for edification, without thinking of its original meaning; they took every one of the 150 psalms into the shrine of Gospel utterances. We who come after them cannot give this particular proof of our belief in the divinity of the Old Testament revelation. In adapting the psalms to the needs of edification, we who desire to consecrate our intellect to Christ must seek counsel of a criticism and an exegesis which are nothing if they are not psychological; that is, if they are not in full accordance with the laws of the human mind.

It is a noteworthy fact, that the latest German commentator on the psalms¹—the editor of an exposition by that unimpassioned but yet evangelical theologian Hupfeld—has no hesitation in including Psalm xvi. among those which were influenced by the Second or Babylonian Isaiah. Obviously the exegesis which finds real though imperfect Christian anticipations in the psalm is much more credible (see p. 133) upon this theory of the date than upon any other. Let us see how the theory lends itself to the purposes of practical exegesis, and regard this not as a royal, but as a Church-psalm.

¹ Dr. Wilhelm Nowack. See Hupfeld's *Psalmen*, 3rd edition, vol. i., p. 233.

*'Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.
I have said unto Jehovah, thou art my Lord:
I have no good beyond thee.'*

The words in the third line are not a mere flower of rhetoric. They tell us that the 'pleasant land,' so fruitful and so fair, would have no charm in the eyes of true Israelites without the spiritual glory of the knowledge of Jehovah's will. Do not mistake the meaning of 'I have said.' The speaker does not mean to tell us that at a certain day and hour he 'read his title clear' to the divine favour. No; he refers not to the past, but to the present. The words of the solemn confession have been uttered just now in his heart, and the rest of the psalm is but an expansion of them. 'Thou art my Lord; Thou art my only happiness.' How thoroughly Christian this is! The Christian and the Moham-medan both address their God as 'Lord,' but in what a different sense! A Christian looks upon his God as not merely his Master, but the director and helper of his work. God and he are united in the same great moral enterprise. The sense of this constitutes his happiness.

*'As for the saints that are in the land,
And thine excellent ones, all my delight is in them.'* ¹

¹ Here I have been obliged to deviate from the Revised Version. Nor can I adopt either of two ingenious conjectures (Baethgen's and Wildeboer's) based more or less on the Sept. and on passages of

Why this mention of the 'saints,' or, literally, 'holy ones' (i.e. the faithful Israelites), and the 'excellent (or, glorious) ones' (i.e. the priests, who in Isaiah xliii. 28, 1 Chronicles xxiv. 5, are called 'holy, or consecrated, princes') almost in the same breath with Jehovah? Because, in the troublesome days which followed the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, the society which a man kept was the test of his religion. Israel was surrounded by heathen peoples, and, as Psalm lxxiii. shows, many believers in Jehovah stumbled at the prosperity of the ungodly (i.e. of the heathen). Our psalmist disclaims connexion with such; Jehovah is his Lord, and Jehovah's priests are his honoured leaders. The house of David has passed into obscurity, and the priests and the teachers of the Scriptures are more and more seen to be, under God, the true defenders of the Church-nation.

*'They multiply their own griefs, who change
(Jehovah) for another.'*

The meaning of this depends on our interpretation of the close of the psalm. Presupposing that vers. 10 and 11 involve the belief in 'eternal life,' one

Isaiah (cf. *Expositor*, Dec., 1891). I have thought it well, however, in this conference, if I may call it so, on a much-prized psalm, to give way to the Received Text by retaining the first part of its third verse, as I have already yielded to the Revised Version by adopting its version of the difficult and, as I think, corrupt words in ver. 2*b*.

may hold that the above words refer either to the great judgment-day, or to the preliminary judgment of the soul after death, when the wicked, as the prophet says, 'shall lie down in anguish.'¹ How should the psalmist desire the short-lived pleasures of these doomed sinners? 'Let me not eat of their dainties,' says a like-minded temple-poet.² For at every meal there would be a libation of wine to some false god ('blood,' our psalmist calls it³), and some light idolatrous phrase would be on every tongue. Therefore,—

*'Let me not pour out their drink-offerings of blood,
Nor take their (idols') names upon my lips.'*

Observe that this fine psalm is free from imprecations. The speaker gazes in sadness at the poor deluded heathen, and passes by. They have their 'portion' in the life of the senses, as the next psalm says (v. 14); but Israel's 'portion' is not chiefly the 'pleasant places' in which *the lines have fallen unto him* (ver. 6), but moral friendship with his God. '*Jehovah is mine appointed portion and cup*' (ver. 5); or, as another poet says, '*Whom have I in heaven (but Thee)?*' meaning that heaven is but 'a closer walk with God.' Our psalmist continues, '*Thou art*

¹ Isa. l. 11.

² Ps. cxli. 4.

³ Cf. the phrase 'the blood of grapes' (or, the grape), Gen. xlix. 11, Eccus. i. 15, 1 Macc. vi. 34. If, with Prof. W. R. Smith (*Religion of the Semites*, p. 214), we take 'blood' literally, the psalm still need not be pre-Exilic (see Isa. lxxv. 11, lxxvi. 3).

continually my lot. 'Continually' implies that spiritual blessings are not like 'treasures upon earth.' 'While he has any being,' the saint will need no other treasure but his God. But the word suggests more than this. There is a larger and a lesser interpretation of the fine word 'continually.' If at the end of the psalm the poet should be found to have risen to the conception of 'eternal life,' it will be not unreasonable to see an allusion to this already. But the two next verses certainly refer in the main to time present.

*'I bless Jehovah, who hath given me counsel,
Yea, in the nights my longings prompt me thereto.
I have set Jehovah before me continually :
For with him at my right hand I cannot be moved.'*

Wise counsel was indeed the great need of the Israelites who returned from Babylon. Sad would have been their fate, if God had not raised up Ezra as a reformer, and the psalmists as purifiers and fosterers of the spiritual life! And what was true of the Church might also be said of each of its members, in so far as they recognized their share in the common work. The comfort of each true believer, as well as of the Church was that expressed by our psalmist in the first part of ver. 7, and by another in the beautiful words, 'Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel' (or, 'according to thy pur-

pose').¹ In other words, regenerate Israel rejoices in the presence of the Holy Spirit. For this best of gifts the speaker who represents his people blesses Jehovah by day and by night. 'Whither can I go from thy spirit?' says another psalmist; 'when I awake, I am still with thee.'² How beautiful! The thought of God is his pillow, and when he rises from his couch, it is to utter the praises of which his heart is full. His eyes are ever towards Jehovah, and he fears not what the future may bring. Trouble itself is a sweet and strengthening wine, because the cup has been filled by the King of love.

How different is the mysticism³ of psalms like xvi., xvii., and lxxiii. from much that passes by this word of various acceptations! Where but in the Bible can we find an absorption in God which does not prevent a true and tender interest in the cares and sorrows of humanity? There is a morbid and artificial corruption of Bible-mysticism which has done violence to our best natural feelings, and even lighted the flames of religious persecution. But the psalmists whom, from their grasp of the mystery of the life in God, we call 'mystic' do not debar themselves from simple, natural pleasures, nor do they close their eyes to the 'pleasant places' of

¹ Ps. lxxiii. 24.

² Ps. cxxxix. 7, 18.

³ I cannot help wishing that we could distinguish the true mysticism from the false by using for the former such a word as *mystique*.

their 'delightsome land.' They have got beyond that most pathetic sigh of a wounded spirit, in which the psalmist appeals to God for clemency as a 'stranger' and a 'sojourner.'¹ But they would cheerfully give up all for God and His law; the Jewish Church is being prepared for the great persecution of the following period. The psalmist knew that he dwelt in God, and God in him, that as a member of the true Israel he was safe in life and in death. Let us, spiritual Israelites, take a lesson from his faith. Only if we can say to our God, 'Thou art my Lord, I have no good beyond thee,' can we join with perfect confidence in the prayer, 'Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.' Perfect trust belongs only to him who has surrendered himself wholly to God. How perfect our psalmist's trust is, may be seen from the fact that he does not repeat this prayer. So clear is his believing insight into God's purposes, that his one prayer passes directly into prophecy and into glad rejoicing at an assured inheritance. And why should not our spiritual standard be equally high? Why should we, living in the full light of the Gospel, be outdone by Jewish saints?

¹ Ps. xxxix. 12. We can hardly accept the interpretation of this passage given in Heb. xi. 13-16. The psalmist's tone precludes the idea that he looks forward to 'a better country, that is, an heavenly.' Would that it were otherwise!

For consider. This 16th psalm is not merely the record of a personal mood, and to be realized only in those exceptional moments when we happen to be in a like mood ourselves. It is a Church-psalm, and describes a state open to every true Jewish Churchman, in so far as he is a Churchman. What was it that made a Jewish Churchman, do you ask? The same which makes each of us a Christian Churchman,—the possession of or the being possessed by the Holy Spirit. The difference between a Jewish and a Christian Churchman is this—that the one had not, and the other has, a clear and consistent idea of the character of his Divine Guest. ‘God, having of old times spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son, . . . the effulgence of His glory, and the very image of His substance.’ So says the nameless author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the words cast a bright light on the difference between the dispensations. Both were dispensations of the Spirit; but there was a want of uniformity, a want of consistency, a want of clearness in the one which made it painfully difficult to maintain the highest level of spiritual religion. But to us a vision has been granted of One whom the Holy Spirit so filled, that an apostle speaks with equal readiness of the Spirit of God and the Spirit

of Christ. The life of Christ is to us the highest embodiment of the Divine Spirit. Why should it be hard to 'set God always before us,' and to find our sole happiness in Him, when we have such a sweet and affecting picture of the character of God in the Gospel history, and when the Father has sent us such a perfect expositor of the things of Jesus in the Paraclete or Comforter? Few Jewish Churchmen probably had the constant sense of the Spirit abiding upon them ; but the meanest Christian Churchman is privileged to have this sense, if so be that he has really believed in Christ, and been 'sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance.' Truly may we say, 'The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places ; yea, I have a goodly heritage' : for to have within us the Spirit of God and of Christ, and to love and trust and rejoice in God, is the secret which transforms this earth into the vestibule of heaven.

II.

'In the forum of a ruined Roman city in what is now Algeria is a pavement-slab, with an unfinished inscription rudely scratched, and still so fresh that it might have been scratched only a night or two before the overthrow of the city. Within an ornamental bower are the words, "To hunt, to bathe, to play, to

laugh—that is to live.” We know the stern but kind judgment which the God in history pronounced on this corrupt type of society. But this low ideal of life was not peculiar to the Romanized subjects of the seven-hilled city. The want of a belief in a second and happier life, open not merely to special favourites of the gods, but to all who followed after righteousness, drove many men at all times into a position practically the same as that of the degenerate Romans. In the autobiographic Book of Ecclesiastes we see an Israelitish thinker succumbing to a sensualistic theory; only at intervals and at the end of the book does a break in the clouds perhaps reveal a loftier view of the aims of life. On the other hand, in the beautiful Book of Wisdom, another Jewish sage, residing at Alexandria, after describing at length the theory and the practice of those who made pleasure their god, expresses his own utter abhorrence of both; and before him the authors of Psalms xvi., xvii., and lxxiii. successfully resist the temptations of sensualism, and burst into the noblest utterances of their own perfect contentment with the true chief good, that is, God. Listen to these words from Psalm xvii. :

*‘ Deliver my soul from the wicked by thy sword ;
From men of the world, whose portion is in life,
And whose craving thou fillest with thy treasure.*

*As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness :
Let me be satisfied, when I awake, with thine image !'*

Do you not seem to hear the ring of one of St. John's favourite phrases---'the world'? 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.' Psalmist and apostle alike teach that the true life is the life in God, and that the soul's true home is not a place, call it earth or call it heaven, but the light which no earthly eye can see of Jehovah's countenance. This is the sweet mysticism of the psalmists, based upon the mystery into which they have been divinely initiated of the 'path of life' (ver. 11). To understand this, it is not enough to be an accomplished critic of words and sentences; a man must have a real affinity to the mind of the psalmists. 'He that is spiritual,' as St. Paul says, 'judgeth all things.'¹ For the doctrine of immortality there may be divers logical arguments; but the scholar of the psalmists does not reach it by any of them. It is to him an almost inevitable inference from the facts of his spiritual experience. (I say nothing at present of the great historical fact which completes his assurance.) Living as he does by prayer, and with a sense of the invisible things which grows every day in strength and purity, he cannot imagine that his intimacy with God will come to an abrupt end. His

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 15.

delight is to carry on God's work in the world, even if it be only by the silent testimony of a godly life ; and will he for his recompense be cast out into 'the land where all things are forgotten' ?¹ There was a time when even psalmists feared this.² But how could a saint who so loved God as to say, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee?' acquiesce in the thought that God's love to him would be terminated by his death ? And why should the lot of those heroic saints of whom tradition told that God had taken them to Himself be an altogether exceptional privilege ? And so in Psalms xlix. 15, lxxiii. 23, 24, we seem to overhear whispered anticipations of something not less glorious for each believer than was granted of old to Enoch and Elijah. True happiness to the psalmists is not merely the round of vanities so unblushingly set forth in that Algerian inscription, nor can the 'path of life' issue in a delusive *mirage*. Thou, O God, being the saint's 'ruler and guide,' he can 'so pass through things temporal' as 'finally not to lose the things eternal.' Or rather there is no sharp antithesis between this world and the next. Heaven is where God is felt to be. The only distinction which Psalms xvi. and xvii. recognize is life with and life without God.

¹ Ps. lxxxviii. 12 (Prayer Book Version).

² Ps. xxx. 8, 9 ; lxxxviii. 5 (both in R.V.).

St. Peter, as reported in the Acts, calls the author of Psalm xvi. a prophet. The psalmists are in fact half-prophets. All prayer is based upon a revelation, and the highest kind of prayer leads on to fresh revelations. Not of course mechanical revelations, if the phrase may be used without offence; the revelations in which a modern exegesis can acquiesce must be and are at once natural and supernatural. The teachers of the Jewish Church-nation refounded—or, if you will, founded—by Ezra, came to believe as they did by a gradual development, under the Spirit's influence, of germs already in their minds. And some modern interpreters find it a much less strain upon their faith to believe that the 'mystic psalms' teach immortality, if these psalms are assigned to the age of Ezra, than when they felt compelled by an uncriticized tradition to refer at any rate Psalms xvi. and xvii. to the rude age of David. The deepening of personal religion which went on during and after the Captivity made it (as one is now permitted to think) natural to the strongest believers to accept the Holy Spirit's highest teaching. Tennyson speaks of 'faintly' trusting the 'larger hope.' The larger hope of those times was personal immortality. It may well be that some Jewish Churchmen could trust it but faintly. But this was not the case with the greater, the mystic psalmists.

*'Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth,
My flesh also dwelleth confidently ;
For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheól,
Neither wilt thou suffer thy godly one to see the pit.'*¹

Does this merely mean that the believer's God will deliver him out of his distress, and not suffer him to go down to the grave in the midst of his days? I cannot think it. The psalmist does not pray as in Psalm xiii., 'Lighten mine eyes, that I sleep not in death.' His tone is calm and his style is smooth. There is in his work none of the abruptness and excitement characteristic of some gloomy persecution psalms.² The only trouble he mentions is the continual presence of a gross heathenism, but God preserves him from being cast down even by this. Yes; there are worse troubles than death. To see millions of our fellow-creatures subject to moral death is far worse to a Christian than to be called away when his work on earth is done. Read the letters of the heralds of the Cross in heathen lands. 'Oh! it is a stifling atmosphere, this,' says a zealous

¹ Ps. xvi. 9, 10 (quoting from R.V., and adopting three marginal renderings). On the rendering 'the pit,' see Dean Perowne's very moderately expressed note.

² This remark does not apply to Ps. xvii. If Pss. xvi. and xvii. were written in the same period, we must suppose that the heathen, whose presence is felt indeed in Ps. xvi., but not as a cause of disquietude, had begun again to trouble faithful Israel. Circumstances seem to have changed almost as frequently in the days of post-exile Israel as in the life of the great poet-king David.

French missionary in Africa.¹ 'To battle with un-mixed heathenism is more painful than our friends at home can imagine. It would be quite unbearable without Him "in whose presence is fulness of joys."' You see, he draws comfort from the 16th psalm. Does he fear death? No; as little as another earnest French believer² who said, 'I cannot be afraid of death, for I have talked so much with God.' The psalmist, be sure, would have said the same thing. The habit of prayer makes it unnatural not to believe in immortality. To say,—

*'O God, thou art my God, early do I seek thee ;
My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth after thee,'*³
would be impossible, after the problem of the future life had once been raised, if God did not answer the prayer by shedding abroad in the heart the consciousness of eternal life. Let us read the 10th verse again, substituting however the phrase 'loving one' for 'godly one.'

*'For thou wilt not leave (or, abandon) my soul to
Sheól ;*

Neither wilt thou suffer thy loving one to see the pit.'

Now, what does 'thy loving one' mean? That depends on what 'love' or 'lovingkindness' means

¹ M. Coillard. Comp. the late Bishop French's last letter.

² Mme. de Broglie, a friend of Erskine of Linlathen.

³ Ps. lxiii. 1.

in the psalms. You could not guess, even from the Revised Version, how often this word occurs, the translators having too commonly put 'mercy' instead of 'lovingkindness.' It has three kindred meanings: 'first, the covenant-love of Jehovah to those who know and serve Him; next, the covenant-love of a servant of Jehovah to his God; and, lastly, the love of Jehovah's servants among themselves' (i.e. brotherly love). By calling himself God's 'loving one' the psalmist implies an argument—virtually the same argument which I have put into words already. The fact that the God of love has entered into a covenant, both with Israel and with each Israelite, has made it possible for a child of man, weak and sinful as he is, to know the everlasting God. Now 'God is not a God of the dead, but a God of the living.' That being so, God's love to man and man's love to God form a bridge by which the human spirit can cross the river of Death unharmed. Not only the true Israel (that is, the Church), but the true Israelite (that is, the believing Churchman), is made—to use New Testament language—'partaker of the divine nature.'¹ 'Because I live,' says the Son of God, 'ye shall live also.'

Do you ask, further, as to the nature of this eternal life? Our Lord Himself tells us, 'This is life eternal,

¹ 2 Pet. i. 4.

that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.' ¹ The psalmist, indeed, could not have uttered the last part of this definition. His eyes were holden, so that he could not see the historical form of the fulfilment of prophecy. What he says, he says of himself; God's 'loving one' (or, 'godly one') is, of course, the psalmist, as in Psalm iv. 3.² But of this he is well aware, that only those who know God spiritually can be in covenant with Him.

'For with thee is the fountain of life :

In thy light can we see light.

*O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee,
And thy righteousness to the upright in heart.'* ³

Now it is in the nature of knowledge to grow. The bonds of sense prevent the knowledge of God from expanding to the uttermost; therefore even God's 'loving one' must die. Calmly does the psalmist look forward to his dissolution; for to die is to depart and be in the fullest sense with God. Some students have been uncertain whether he expects to pass through an intermediate state, or anticipates an immediate admission to the divine presence after death.⁴ The story of Enoch and

¹ John xvii. 3.

² Where A.V. and R.V. both render 'him that is godly.'

³ Ps. xxxvi. 9, 10.

⁴ See note, p. 269, &c.

Elijah would suggest the latter view to him ; two post-Exilic prophecies the former. The question is, Did the authors of Psalms xvi. and xvii. know either of those prophecies as well as those striking narratives? For my own part, I cannot doubt that they did ; for at the end of Psalm xvii. I read these remarkable words,—
‘ Let me be satisfied, when I awake, with thy form ! ’

Does not this at once remind us of Isaiah xxvi. 19,¹ ‘Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust,’ not to mention the still later prophecy in Daniel xii. 2, ‘Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake’? Now, if we hold that these psalms belong to the post-Exile period, how can we be surprised to find in one of them an allusion to the resurrection? And since they are twin-psalms, the Christian instinct must be right in interpreting them both as referring to the same great belief. An intermediate state must therefore also be presupposed—not a joyless Hades, in which the voice of prayer and praise is hushed, but a true though faint copy of the mansion prepared in heaven. Our Lord, who nourished His own spiritual life upon the psalms, beautifully expresses the psalmists’ meaning, when He says in the parable that ‘the beggar was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom.’

¹ See Mr. G. A. Smith’s striking treatment of this late prophecy, and of the prophetic intuition of immortality, in the *Expositor’s Bible*.

That the psalmists' expressions are vague, I know. They had a firm but not a very definite faith in a future life. We cannot wonder that many of the Jews hesitated to admit such sweet and comforting ideas. The Sadducees, as the Gospels tell us, expressly denied the doctrine of the resurrection, and were rebuked by our Lord for their want of insight. They were the agnostics of their time; at least, they wished to minimize the element of mystery in revealed religion. It was Jesus, the 'Author and Perfecter of our faith,' who saved His Church from the variations and vacillations of Judaism by the great fact of the resurrection. Say what you will of the difference between prediction and poetry, it remains true that the noblest passages of the psalms belong to Jesus Christ in a higher sense than to any Jewish or Christian saint, simply because He and He alone is the perfect Israelite, the fulfilment of the ideals of the elder, and the pattern for the imitation of the younger Church. Sweet it is to find something in which we can agree with the most uncritical interpreters, viz. the view that the best parts of the psalms are true anticipations of Christ, 'that in all things,' as St. Paul says, 'he may have the pre-eminence.'

The fewest words are the best in summing up a psalm like this. I would only ask, Have we in some

measure caught that faith and hope which glowed so brightly in the psalmist? Unless we can conscientiously apply vers. 9-11 in some degree to ourselves, there is no inward compulsion upon us to apply it in a secondary and mystic sense to Christ. It would be something, no doubt, merely to have discovered an improved form of the argument for Christianity from the Christian elements in the Old Testament. But the 16th psalm ought to enable us to do more than this. The holy psalmist talked with God. Can we in like manner talk with God, and with the Saviour who died to bring us near to God? Noble as the prayers of the Psalter are, we ought not to rest in them, but to follow in the path which the psalmists trod. 'Let me hear what the Lord God will say *concerning me*,' says the Prayer Book Version of Psalm lxxxv. 8.¹ 'Speak thou to me, O Lord, not Moses, nor the prophets,' says the devout author of the *Imitation*. The habit of spiritual converse with God gives us an insight into His purposes, and enables us who are united to Christ by faith to apply to ourselves St. Peter's comment upon ver. 9: 'Whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.'²

¹ The Septuagint inserts the words ἐν ἐμοί.

² Acts ii. 24.

NOTE ON PSALM XVII. 15.

It is impossible to study Ps. xvi. without illustrating it by its fellow-psalm, which, at its conclusion, rises into the same bright region of ideal hope as Ps. xvi. This is how ver. 15 runs :—

As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness ;
Let me be satisfied, when I awake, with thy form.

Ps. xvii. is one of the most striking persecution-psalms of the late Persian age.¹ We cannot on that account say that it is bound to contain a reference to the new great hopes current in that period ; but we may, when two interpretations are equally possible, prefer the one which involves such a reference. The ‘awaking,’ then, spoken of in ver. 15, is not that from nightly sleep, but is of a transcendental order. בִּקְרִיִּי, literally ‘at the awaking,’ may mean ‘when life’s short *night* is past,’ or when the relative sleep of the intermediate state gives place to the intense vitality of a new phase of being. In the one case the higher immortality is the hope of those whom the psalmist represents ; in the other, this combined with the resurrection. And if both the idea of the resurrection and that of immortality are equally characteristic of the Persian age, what object is there

¹ I take the following from a university lecture printed in the *Expositor Times*, Aug., 1891.

in resting satisfied with what is in one sense the lesser meaning? If, in Isa. xxvi. 19, Dan. xii. 2, 'awaking' has the definite sense of rising again, what reason is there for giving it any vaguer meaning here? Notice, however, that there is no separating veil between heaven and earth. The risen man will, according to the psalmist, see God as truly as if he were in heaven. 'Face' and 'form' are, of course, but symbols for the divine glory. Need I add that this verse, especially if taken with the preceding one, is thoroughly Zoroastrian in spirit? (See *Yasna* xliii. 3.)

But here I come into conflict, to some extent, with the latest commentator on the psalms, Professor Kirkpatrick of Cambridge. This conscientious scholar comments as follows on ver. 15: 'The words are commonly explained of awaking from the sleep of death to behold the face of God in the world beyond, and to be transfigured into His likeness. Death is no doubt spoken of as sleep (xiii. 3), and resurrection as awakening (Isa. xxvi. 19; Dan. xii. 2). But elsewhere the context makes the meaning unambiguous. Here, however, this meaning is excluded by the context. The psalmist does not anticipate death, but prays to be delivered from it (vers. 8 ff).'¹ Professor Kirkpatrick's criticism

¹ *The Book of Psalms*, vol. i. (Cambridge, 1891), p. 83.

upon the incomplete interpretation which he adduces, is partly justified. The psalmist's words do not refer exclusively to the state of the soul after death. But he errs, I venture to think, in supposing that either here or in xvi. 9-11 'death fades from the psalmists' view' altogether. Reading Psalms xvi. and xvii. as products of the late Persian period, when the higher Jewish religion had become conscious of its tendency, and been stimulated by the example of Zoroastrianism, I find it very difficult to assert that there is no reference at all to the bliss into which, according to the higher religion, the soul is introduced after death. Let us pass to Ps. xvi. The psalmist prays thus: 'Preserve me, thou God in whom I trust, to whom I am entirely devoted, and who art my sole happiness.' The divine answer is: 'I will not abandon thee to thy murderous assailants, but will both prolong thy life and sweeten it with proofs of my lovingkindness, and with the assurance of my nearness.' Does the prayer seem to us sufficiently covered by the answer, from the point of view which we have adopted? For, after all, the peril of death must return, and, according to the traditional orthodoxy, 'Who remembereth [God] in death, or can give [Him] thanks in the pit?' The deliverance, then, for which the psalmist prays must be twofold: first, from the immediate peril of death, and, secondly,

that from death itself absolutely and entirely. And, to judge from the lofty tone of vers. 5-8, he cares most for the second. The life for which he craves is that communion with God which, though begun in this life, can only be perfected in another. Death, to the nobler psalmists, is not departure to dark Sheól, but an 'assumption' to be with God (Ps. xlix. 16, lxxiii. 24). Such death cannot 'fade from the psalmist's view.'

I know the objections that may be raised to this interpretation, and have already endeavoured to answer them in my *Bampton Lectures*. It may be said, for instance, that it presupposes a mysticism in the psalmist, which is alien to the Jewish character. 'For opposite reasons,' says Professor Seth, 'neither the Greek nor the Jewish mind lent itself to mysticism.'¹ The answer is, first, to define mysticism rightly, and next to enlarge our view of the facts of Jewish literature. Another objection is that I have antedated the distinction between this life and the next—this and the coming age. There is some reason, however, to think that in this, as in many other respects, the evolution of Jewish thought has been continuous, and that, while elaborate logical theories were late, the germs—or rather some of the germs—of later theories can be traced, if not with

¹ (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, xvii. 130.)

clearness to the first, yet to the second century of the Persian rule in Palestine. On this subject I cannot now dwell at length, but will ask the reader to remember the constant presence of Zoroastrian ideas in the neighbourhood of the Jews. The distinction in question was already familiar to Mazda-worshippers, and its adoption would be helped forward by the nascent consciousness of the Jews that 'communities are for the divine sake of individual life, for the sake of the love and truth that is in each heart.'¹ Could this love and truth be 'as water spilt on the ground'? Must there not be a second stage of life? There was, however, no sharpness in the antithesis, because, according to a fundamental principle alike of the higher Zoroastrian and the higher Jewish religion, heaven is primarily not a place, but a spiritual state. One point more and I will pass on. The reader will not be surprised that here, too, I suppose a diversity of interpretation to have existed from the first, and to have been anticipated and sanctioned by the writers of Ps. xvi. and xvii. I have stated which interpretation was, in my opinion, preferred by the psalmists, and mentioned a second less adequate, but still possible, one. There is also a third which I have indicated in my commentary. It was adopted by Theodore of Mopsuestia of old and

¹ Kingsley.

has found its ablest modern advocate in Rudolf Smend.¹ The view is that the speaker is the Church-nation personified. Modern minds find it difficult to take in the nationalistic interpretation of the psalms; I have endeavoured in my *Bampton Lectures* to meet their difficulties. There is much in the Psalter which is primarily said of the true Israel. But since whatever is said of the Church-nation is applicable to each faithful Israelite, we must, I think, reject Smend's assertion of the exclusive reference of Ps. xvi. and xvii. to the nation. 'A study of the spiritual atmosphere of the psalmist's age leaves no doubt in my mind that Ps. xvi. 10, 11 [and still more Ps. xvii. 15] must have been appropriated without deduction by faithful Jews.'²

¹ *Zeitschrift f.d. alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1888, P. 93-96. בְּהִקְיִי, 'at the awaking,' is very difficult on Smend's theory. He proposes to correct בְּהִקְיִי, 'when thou awakest.' God is said to 'awake' to judgment in xxxv. 23, lxxiii. 20. But a reference to the judgment introduces a jarring note.

² *B.L.*, p. 407.

CHAPTER IX.

PSALM XXIV.¹

PSALM xxiv. 3 (part), 8 (part) :

‘ Who shall ascend into the hill of Jehovah ? . . .

Who is the King of glory ? ’

Two striking questions, even apart from the context. Mountain scenery spoke not to the ancients with the same thrilling and inspiring voice with which it speaks to us ; and yet many a fair Eastern mountain had that to give for which the traveller gladly ascended its wooded heights. But here, says the psalmist, is a mountain still more difficult, on moral, not physical grounds, than snow-white Hermon ; it is the hill where Jehovah dwells. Who can venture to climb it ? And the other question is equally searching. What is the King of glory like ? How shall His nature be best described ? A God can give but that which He has. Is the King of glory like unto or

¹ Comp. *B.L.*, pp. 235, 236.

different from the nature which He has given to man? Upon the solution of the problem the whole character of a religion depends. Nobly has Charles Wesley described the soul's struggle to obtain an adequate one. From that truly great hymn, 'Come, O Thou Traveller unknown,' how can I help quoting a single verse?—

‘ Wilt Thou not yet to me reveal
Thy new, unutterable name?
Tell me, I still beseech Thee, tell;
To know it now resolved I am;
Wrestling, I will not let Thee go,
Till I Thy name, Thy nature know.’

But I wish, not directly to assume the Christian vantage-ground in answering these questions, but to consider how the magnificent psalm in which they occur may, with due regard to the laws of the human mind, be interpreted. I wish that we may learn how to make the reading and the singing of the psalms, more than it sometimes is, a sacrifice of the intellect. To understand the 24th psalm we must take it in connexion with the 23rd. The Song of the Shepherd concludes with the hope of dwelling in the house of Jehovah for ever; and the psalm before us, putting aside the solemn overture in vers. 1, 2, begins with a question as to the qualifications of those who can ascend the mountain where Jehovah dwells. The hope of Jehovah's lamb is not merely to spend all

his days in the temple, much as he loves the house where he has so often 'seen God's power and glory,'¹ it is to feel that wherever he may be, there the tent of his Shepherd is stretched above him—there he may be, inwardly at least, safe from his enemies—there he may experience that 'lovingkindness' which, as a kindred psalm expresses it, 'is better than life itself.'² And now each Israelite who covets this high privilege of seeing, though but in a shadow, the face of God is taught to question himself as to his ability to pass the divine tests. The verses in which this lesson is conveyed (vers. 2-5) remind us of the 15th psalm, and both have a certain affinity to the declaration which the soul of a deceased person pronounces before the divine judge Osiris, according to the religion of Egypt. 'I am pure, am pure, am pure' (from each of the transgressions mentioned), the soul repeats; and then, if it has spoken the truth, it becomes justified, and enters into Elysium—the land of sunshine and fruitful fields which is the Egyptian heaven.³ But our psalm does not only, nor even primarily, refer to the great final examination of souls, nor yet to the awful judgment spoken of in the 1st psalm, when the wicked—the false Israelites—shall be 'like the chaff

¹ Ps. lxiii. 2.² Ps. lxiii. 3.³ Compare also the importance attached by Pindar to moral preparation for the future life. *καθαροί* was a term for those initiated into the Mysteries. Cf. Dyer, *The Gods in Greece*, p. 209.

which the wind driveth away,'¹ and God's people upon earth shall be, as the prophet said, 'all righteous.'² Permissible as it would be to expound this psalm sometimes of a judgment to come, it relates primarily, not to the future, but to the present. A judgment is continually going on. God is ever distributing rewards and punishments; and if we only took a more spiritual and a less earthly view of His providential assignments, we should say, 'Surely God is gracious unto Israel, even unto the pure in heart,'³ because to them He gives, not those seeming goods for which worldlings crave, but those which never pass away—'faith, hope, charity,' and above all, the inward vision of God. It is to this last that one of the greatest of the mystic psalmists refers, when he says—

*Thou makest known to me (not merely thou wilt
make known) the path of life;*

Near thy face is fulness of joys;

*Pleasures are in thy right hand for evermore.'*⁴

The 24th psalm, like that which precedes it, belongs to a group of very peculiar psalms—those which speak of being a guest in Jehovah's house (Guest-psalms we may call them), the material house or sanctuary of Jehovah having almost become a

¹ Ps. i. 4.

² Isa. lx. 21.

³ Ps. lxxiii. 1.

⁴ Ps. xvi. 11.

grand metaphor for the spiritual presence-chamber discerned only by faith. Neither the Jewish Church, indeed, nor even its most advanced members, saw clearly whither the course of revelation was tending. The temple always held a place of special honour in their minds ; it never quite became to any of them merely a symbol or material metaphor. But, as we shall see more and more, some of the psalmists were being guided to a view of forms which is almost Christian in its spirituality. They felt that, even when far from the temple, they could enjoy a very close communion with their God, not dissimilar in kind to that which they knew so well on Mount Zion. They could not have given a consistent and logical theory of their experience, but the experience itself they recorded in their temple-songs, and they thus became true heralds of the Gospel. How, in fact, could Jesus have won His disciples if Jeremiah and the psalmists had not first of all prepared the ground ? The saying, '*Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God,*' presupposes a spiritual movement among the Jews, the impulse to which was given by these illuminated teachers. Do not suppose that I shall try to find the full Gospel in the 24th psalm. It does not contain as large an evangelical element as some others, because it lacks that sweet mysticism which endears to us the 16th, the 63rd, and the 73rd.

It is meant perhaps for beginners in the spiritual life. It tells us virtually that the only sacrifice which is acceptable to God is that of moral obedience; but it does not tell us how that obedience is to be rendered, and gives a very meagre description of it compared, for instance, with our Lord's in the beatitudes of His first sermon. Yet it says quite enough to stimulate spiritual ambition. 'For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance.'¹

*'He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart;
That hath not set his desire upon wickedness,
And that hath not sworn deceitfully,—
He shall receive a blessing from Jehovah,
Even righteousness from the God of his salvation.'*

Do you ask what blessing? I reply, one blessing to the worshipper as an individual, and another as a branch on the stem of God's Church; the blessing of the sense of God's love to him personally, and the blessing of 'rejoicing' sooner or later 'in the gladness of God's people,' and 'giving thanks with his inheritance.'² And the link between the two blessings is this, that without a spiritual movement in the individuals who form the nation, God's promise to the Church (which ideally is the nation) must remain unfruitful. And so to each of us the psalmist would say, Purity of heart and life is the one condition of all

¹ Matt. xiii. 12.

² Ps. cvi. 5 (Prayer Book).

the best blessings. Each man must be in some sense his own John the Baptist before he can be admitted into the inner circle of the friends of Jesus.¹ If even a Jewish psalmist could say,

'I wash mine hands in innocency,

*And (so) would I compass thine altar, Jehovah,'*²

the sternest moral self-criticism cannot be too severe for those who would take part in the prayers, the praises, and the sacraments of the evangelical Church. Far from any of us be the spirit of the Pharisee! There is One who accompanies us in our self-criticism with eyes as keen as they are loving, and who breathes into us a holy discontent with any earthly attainments. From Him alone can we receive the purification which is better than that of hyssop, and without which no correction of the details of our life will be acceptable to God. For Christ is not only 'the end of the Law,' but the 'end' or consummation of the Psalter. When the psalmist says, 'Only he that hath clean hands and a pure heart can dare to ascend Jehovah's mountain,' we must expand it by those words of St. Peter,³ 'purifying their hearts (i.e. their consciences) by faith,' and again, 'elect . . . unto

¹ Theodoret illustrates a partly parallel passage (Ps. xxv. 12) by John the Baptist's answer to the question, 'What shall we do?'

² Ps. xxvi. 6.

³ Acts xv. 9; 1 Pet. i. 2. It is unimportant for our present purpose who actually wrote these words, which are in the fullest sense Scriptures.

obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.' And yet we must not despise even the somewhat bare catechism of this temple-poet, remembering that no Scripture is without an educational value, even for us with our (as we hope) advanced knowledge. It is well to turn back sometimes, as Lessing long ago advised his too sceptical countrymen, to the first pages of our primer, and learn to sympathize with the 24th psalm, when it says (ver. 6),—

*'Such is the race of those that inquire after Jehovah,
Of those that seek the face of Jacob's God.'*

And now notice the connexion between vers. 1 and 2 and those which follow. If we prepare ourselves aright to 'stand in God's holy place,' how exceeding great is our reward! For into whose presence is it that we enter? and whose are the 'hands stretched out to draw us near'? It is He to whom 'the earth belongeth and the fulness thereof,' who 'founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods,' and who will 'make new heavens and a new earth,' and regenerate a people who shall be 'all righteous.'¹ And now add the distinctively Christian thought that it is also He who 'spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all,' and does not the reward of our evangelical self-discipline shine with a still

¹ Isa. lx. 21.

deeper, softer brightness? I know that we all have a tincture of Christianity, but it is only the consistent follower of a holy Saviour who can 'receive the blessing' of a strong and undoubting faith in his own and the world's future. It is only he who can look around on this magnificent but mysterious universe, not merely (like Job) with reverential awe, laying his hand upon his mouth, but with trustful, filial love, and exclaim, 'How great, and rich, and strong is our Father!' And if such an one turns his gaze to the hazards and perils of our national history, is not the reward of a disciplined Christian character equally great? Who are the most hopeful politicians? Those who both in thought and in practice are most earnestly Christian.

And the editor of the psalm (for I scruple not to press one of the surest critical theories into the service of edification) has provided for the wants of such religious patriots both in the Jewish and—may I not add?—in the English Church. He had by him a fragment of an older psalm, too beautiful to be left to perish, and joined it on, in the manner common to Jewish with Assyrian and Indian editors of sacred hymns, to the short Guest-psalm which precedes. It must originally have belonged to a processional hymn of victory, a Jewish *Te Deum*. How noble it is! You know the words; let me try to reproduce the scene.

We are among the crowd in the streets of Jerusalem, and as we gaze a hero of mighty stature draws nigh, alone, and 'marching in the greatness of his strength.'¹ He stands before his palace, and a loyal cry bursts from his people, '*Lift up your heads, O ye gates.*' They mean that no gate of man's device is fit for so noble a king to enter by; just as the prophet whose work begins at Isaiah xl. would have the valleys exalted and the mountains and hills made low to prepare a highway for Jehovah.² For it is Jehovah, none else, who approaches. The gates, which the poet boldly endows with life, well know this; but for the pleasure of hearing His name, they ask, as if in surprise, '*Who is the King of glory?*' And again and again the answer echoes, '*Jehovah the Strong and Valiant, Jehovah the Valiant in battle, Jehovah Sabdoth is his name.*'

You may be sure that something more is meant by this than meets the ear. Throughout the post-Exile period the temple was becoming more and more regarded as a symbol of the greater sanctuary not made with hands. The old popular notion of a territorial and local Deity had faded away, and the traditional names of God had received an ampler meaning. Jehovah was not merely the 'God of the armies of Israel,' but the God of all the hosts of

¹ Isa. lxiii. 1.² Isa. xl. 4.

heaven, the God of the stars and of the angels, and of all the forces of nature,—the God who needs not to descend from His throne, for at a word from Himself His will is done. The psalmist is therefore really thinking of the triumph of the omnipotent God in His heavenly sanctuary. This he figures as an ascent to the earthly temple, the gate of which is in his own time still called ‘the gate of Jehovah,’¹ and from which the poets and prophets still say that Jehovah issues forth to fight for His people.²

What deliverance was originally commemorated is uncertain. The song could be applied to many a grand interposition of ‘him that keepeth Israel.’ It was well fitted to raise the confidence of such a worshipper as is described in ver. 4 to be told that his covenant-God was far more than a match for the mightiest kings of the earth. For the devout Israelite subordinated his own joys and griefs to those of his people, and between the return from the Exile and the Maccabæan insurrection Israel was literally a ‘poor and needy’ people, the natural prey of its stronger neighbours. To sing this hymn was therefore a heroic act of faith. It was a prophecy that Jehovah would not ‘give Israel over unto death,’ but would overthrow its most powerful enemies, both without and within, till

¹ Cf. Ps. cxviii. 19, 20. Note also the prominence in the requirement of righteousness from those who enter these gates.

² Isa. lxvi. 6 ; cf. Zech. xiv. 3, Ps. lxviii. 35.

a 'new song' should be sung by a regenerate people on the great judgment-day.

To persons of a mystic turn of mind, who felt the sweetness of the hidden life, and who had got far beyond the elementary teaching of vers. 3-6, we can hardly doubt that the latter part of the psalm (I mean the song, or fragment of a song, that was added on) supplied delightful material for pious meditation. In the synoptic gospels the prophetic summons in Isaiah xl. 3, 4, is interpreted metaphorically of the preparation of the heart.¹ And we have no reason to think that the symbolic interpretation of ancient phrases was altogether new in the time of the Evangelists. If the material temple had become virtually a symbol of the heart of the believing worshipper, who even 'in a dry and weary land'² had immediate access to his God, may we not, in the spirit of the Evangelists and of their great copyist, John Bunyan, find a new and yet a true interpretation of these poetic words,

'Lift up your heads, O ye gates, . . .

That the King of glory may come in'?

It is indeed no mere rhetorical figure that the heart has gates, which may be closed even against the King of glory. The wise men of Israel were accustomed to the idea that the spirit is to a man what a fortified

¹ Matt. iii. 3, Mark i. 3, Luke iii. 4.

² Ps. lxiii. 1 (see chap. xi.).

city is to a country. 'He that ruleth his spirit,' says one, 'is better than he that taketh a city.'¹ 'He that hath no rule over his own spirit,' says another, 'is like a city that is broken down and without walls.'² 'Keep thy heart with all diligence,' says a third; 'for out of it are the issues of life.'³ In this last passage, we see that the parable has become an allegory, the figure and the meaning of the figure being fused together. We may explain it, 'Guard thy heart as thy best possession, for all good and evil influences proceed from it.' But how *can* I guard my own heart? 'Give me thy heart,' is the reply of personified Wisdom;⁴ anticipate the temptations of the world by early taking heed of her strict but wholesome precepts. And what is the Wisdom of Proverbs i.-ix. but God in so far as He reveals His all-wise purposes for man's present and future salvation? Jehovah Sabáoth was, to an Israelite in David's time, the God of battles; but He has become the God who conquers men by coming to them with moral and spiritual gifts, in order, by sharing their lowliness, to make them great: who does not remember the fine saying, '*Thy gentleness (or rather lowliness) made me great*'?⁵ And so in the Second Isaiah we read, '*Thus saith the high and lofty One that abideth for ever, whose name is Holy*

¹ Prov. xvi. 32.² Prov. xxv. 28.³ Prov. iv. 23.⁴ Prov. xxiii. 26.⁵ Ps. xviii. 35.

*One : I abide in the high and holy place, with him also that is contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'*¹ Illustrate the latter part of this psalm by such passages, and it will point onwards to the sweet 51st psalm, which bids us pray,

' Create in me a clean heart, O God ;

*And renew a firm spirit within me.'*²

Hitherto we have studied the two parts of the psalm in the order in which they have been placed by the Jewish editor. The psalm thus treated becomes a fitting Christmas hymn. For what is the spiritual meaning of the nativity, but that our 'meek and lowly' Saviour loves to humble Himself anew in the poor lodging of each human heart ? To one who feels that he cannot even obey the smallest of Wisdom's precepts, can neither get 'clean hands' nor a 'pure heart' in his own strength, and whose longing often is rather that Wisdom may become his guest, than he Wisdom's, the order of the Jewish editor is the natural one. Such an one first examines himself in the light of the question and answer in vers. 3-6, or that of their Christian equivalent the Beatitudes ; and then with joyous but humble faith invites the Sinner's Friend to enter and purify his heart. For has not Wisdom said, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock : if any man

¹ Isa. lvii. 15.

² Ps. li. 10.

hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me' ?¹ But there are times when another order of the two parts of the psalm seems more natural. He who follows the life of Christ with even more sympathy than the lover of poetry follows some epic or dramatic strain, would gladly forget himself and live in the great deeds of his Master. Such an one thinks of the lowly Son of man raised to the highest heavens as the reward of His obedience unto death, and mentally transposes the parts of the psalm, thus obtaining an appropriate hymn for Easter and Ascensiontide. Far above that star-bright vault which perhaps originally suggested the title 'Jehovah of hosts,' he follows his Lord—the Lord of hosts²—with the inner eye, and takes up, with as much fervour as the most uncritical reader of the psalms the glowing Ascension Ode of Drummond of Hawthornden, which is in part but the 24th psalm rewritten,—

'Now each ethereal gate
 To Him hath opened been ;
 And Glory's King in state
 His palace enters in :
 Now come is this High Priest
 In the most holy place,
 Not without blood addrest,
 With glory Heaven, the Earth to crown with grace ?'

¹ Rev. iii. 20.

² I venture to apply this title to our Lord, because I do not believe that the *κύριος* of Sept. was meant as a full translation of Yahveh.

And seeing the 'High Priest of our profession seated in royal glory at God's right hand, he asks himself, not with shrinking awe, but with faith in the indwelling presence, '*Who shall ascend (like my Lord) into Jehovah's mount? and who shall rise up in his holy place?*' And the answer is echoed from within: 'He in whose heart Christ dwelleth by faith, and who seeketh those things which are above, he shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.'

CHAPTER X.

PSALMS XXVI. AND XXVIII.¹

THE 26th and the 28th are twin-psalms, and reflect light upon each other. You might imagine that in the first verse of the former the Church, which is the speaker, says more than it can justify, and that its rash self-confidence will sustain a fall. For there are two kinds of self-confidence. One belongs to the man who says that he can do without God, because in the depths of his nature there are inexhaustible springs of strength and happiness; another to him who says, 'I trust in the Lord without wavering,' without having learned in the school of the Holy Spirit what this rare experience means. To do the psalmist—that is, the Jewish Church—justice, we want to see how his profession wore. The 28th psalm may enable us to do so. Anxious as the

¹ Comp. *B.L.*, pp. 230, 233.

times were in which the 26th psalm was written, a deepening gloom is manifest at the first glance in the 28th. If the Church's confidence is still maintained, it will be a proof that the words of Psalm xxvi. 1 are no exaggeration. But before we lovingly examine the expressions of the 28th psalm — expressions which are as much a historical document as any chronicle could be,—let us seek to realize the situation portrayed in the earlier psalm. In vers. 9 and 10 we read,

*'Take not away my soul with sinners,
Nor my life with men of blood :
In whose hands is mischief,
And their right hand is full of bribes.'*

Certainly these words were not written under a summer sky ; storm and tempest were coming up from the horizon. The psalmist lived during one of the darker parts of the period between Ezra and the Maccabees.¹ He and his fellow believers were surrounded by openly ungodly men, partly, as other kindred psalms show, foreign tyrants (for the Persians were not always kind to their Jewish subjects), partly traitorous Israelites, not less tyrannical than the Persians, whose hands were stained with the blood of their innocent victims. These false Jews, as we can

¹ The 'anointed' spoken of in Ps. xxviii. 8 is probably the high priest. Cf. Lev. iv. 3, 5.

see from vers. 5 and 6, had given up the habit of worshipping the true God in the temple, and met together in 'congregations' of their own, not for worship, but to plan fresh outrages on the defenceless servants of Jehovah. Ver. 4 further mentions 'dissemblers' or hypocrites, who would fain have been admitted to the confidence of the righteous, but whose treacherous wiles were seen through by the sharp-sighted psalmist. The Church has full confidence in the just judgment of God, which, though as yet delayed, will surely be 'revealed from heaven against all ungodliness.' 'Take not away my soul with sinners,' she cries, 'when thou comest.' But when Psalm xxviii. was composed, the peril of true believers had become still greater; and unless the Divine Judge soon appears, the true Israel will become (so the first verse declares) '*like those that have gone down into the pit.*' Bitter imprecations force their way to the lips of these much-tried saints. Not content with praying to be set on the right hand of the Judge, they assume the character of His assessors, and call for the immediate punishment of the evil-doers.

*'Give them according to their work,
And according to the evil of their doings :
Give them after the operation of their hands ;
Render to them their deserts.'*

Dare we praise—can we blame them? Our Lord has said, ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged,’ and in their over-wrought feelings these Jewish Churchmen both judged and condemned. And yet had they not a strong excuse? Here and there, outside the land of Israel, a true though faint light may have shone from heaven; but such heathen as the Jews at this time knew were offenders against the primal laws of morality, while their Jewish helpers were alike untrue to their nationality and their religion. And if we survey the scene from the point of view of history, is it not plain that, had the effort to crush Israel been successful, the prophecies of salvation could not, humanly speaking, have been fulfilled, and the Christ could not have come? The nobler Israelites had more than a dim perception of this. They were aware of the spiritual mission entrusted to them; ‘who,’ they said to Jehovah, ‘will give thee thanks in the pit’ (i.e. in Hades)? Can we wonder then, that, as the darkness closed about them, they became dismayed, alike for Israel (for they were patriots¹) and for the deposit of true religion of which Israel was the shrine?

And yet true believers, true Churchmen, however dismayed, were not entirely without hope. They still ventured to call Jehovah ‘my rock,’ ‘my strong-

¹ In the sense in which Nehemiah was a patriot (Neh. ii. 3).

hold,' 'my shield,' some of those consecrated symbolic words which abound in the psalms, and which imply so firm a faith in the invisible. By addressing God thus under such circumstances, they fully justified the claim which they had shortly before advanced, of 'trusting in Jehovah without wavering'; and the more we study the 28th psalm, the more we shall be convinced that the professions of its fellow psalm were but the literal statement of inward spiritual facts.

But some one may ask, Would not the psalm be more perfect without any claims or professions at all? To God the very secrets of the heart are all open. True, but the essence of prayer is free communion with God: 'Pour out your heart before him.' Prayer is not merely asking for things; it is the converse of friend with Friend. And since we cannot but examine ourselves whether we have been faithful to our covenant with God, why should we be hindered from telling Him how, as we think, we stand with Him? 'If our heart condemn us not,' then, as St. John says, 'we have confidence toward God';¹ and if our heart condemn us, then, I suppose, the natural thing is to tell God of this, and to appeal to the provision made in the covenant for our cleansing from all unrighteousness. The condensed and purified extract of the

¹ 1 John iii. 21.

devotions of the Latin Church supplied in the collects is by no means without appeals to the comparative purity of the Church's conscience. I willingly admit that these appeals display a more developed spirituality than is found in Psalms xxvi. and xxviii. It is plain that those who wrote the collects laid somewhat more stress on the general tone of the character than on the particular details of practice. And accordingly Christians trained in their school may find it hard to sympathize with negative statements like those in vers. 4 and 5 of Psalm xxvi. ; even positive statements they will probably make with much reluctance, a conscience sharpened by the Spirit of Christ being naturally predisposed to humble confessions of failure. Still a Christian who reads the Bible historically as well as devotionally may admire the first part of Psalm xxvi. for its childlike simplicity. And though the views of duty opened by nineteen Christian centuries may be deeper than those of the psalmist, yet we have not outgrown, and never shall outgrow, the need of a childlike spirit. A too introspective religion would not be conducive either to our growth in grace or to the success of our work ; but never to examine ourselves as to our performance of particular duties would show that we were careless of the approval of our Father, and forgetful of the solemn condition attached to Christ's parting promise,

*'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.'*¹

But let us give some attention to the details of the childlike professions of the psalmist. The same Holy Spirit who taught the apostles taught him; and, making due allowance for different circumstances, the words which the psalmist wrote for the Jewish Church cannot be without a message for the Christian. *'I walk still in my integrity,'* he says. It is no trifle for any one to be able to say this when Providence seems to be on the side of the ungodly. *'Dost thou still retain thine integrity?'*² said Job's wife to him when an awful disease--the type of sin--came upon that model of ancient virtue. And even now the tempter puts this question to many a struggling Christian in the vortex of modern life. Is it not worth while to learn how a Jewish saint resisted such a temptation? Now read the second half of the first verse, *'I trust in Jehovah without wavering.'* This means, I am sure, that (in the words of the collect) they who do lean only upon the hope of God's heavenly grace will (in ways unknown to man) evermore be defended by His mighty power.³

The next profession of the psalmist is equally suitable for an earnest Christian.

¹ John xv. 7.

² Job. ii. 9.

³ Collect for fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

*‘For thy lovingkindness is ever before my eyes ;
And I have walked in thy truthfulness.’*

‘Thy lovingkindness’ ; he might simply have said, ‘Thou, O God.’ For of course he means the same thing as another psalmist who declares, ‘I have set Jehovah always before me.’¹ But he wishes to convey a deep lesson to the Church. Would there be any comfort in directing our thoughts continually towards God unless we had learned with St. John, and with the psalmist, that God is Love? We studied the meaning of God’s lovingkindness in chap. iii. (p. 178), and saw that it had reference to the gracious covenant, given with a view to man’s salvation, and known, however imperfectly, even to the Jewish Church. To have God’s lovingkindness² ever before one’s eyes is to look to Him alone for all blessings, both temporal and spiritual, for food, for shelter, for guidance, for moral instruction, and, most important of all, to frail and tempted man, for conversion and forgiveness. And which conception of God is dearest to the psalmist after that of His lovingkindness? His truthfulness.³ The two expressions are almost

¹ Ps. xvi. 8.

² St. Augustine, misled by the *misericordia* of the Vulgate, sees an allusion to the narrow escape of the sinner from the consuming fire.

³ See Exod. xxxiv. 6 (cf. Num. xiv. 18), where the proclamation of the divine name includes the title, ‘rich in lovingkindness and truthfulness’ (or, truth).

synonymous; they represent different aspects of the same attribute: God loves us, and being ever true to Himself, He is truthful or faithful to us, that is, to His covenant for our salvation. And so that beautiful little anthem which we call Psalm cxvii. says,—

'O praise Jehovah, all ye nations;

Laud him, all ye peoples.

For his lovingkindness is mighty over us,

And the truthfulness of Jehovah endureth for ever.'

The thought of Him who is 'the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever' may well exercise a transforming influence on the heart, and form, as it were, a spiritual atmosphere, in which the believer can walk, unhurt by the poisonous vapours around him. 'I have walked,' says the psalmist, 'in thy truthfulness.' And if the believer distrusts his own ability to do this, then let him say with another psalmist, 'Guide me in thy truthfulness, and teach me';¹ and again, 'Send forth thy light and thy truthfulness, that they may lead me.'²

Next come the negative professions:

'I have not sat with vain (i.e. good-for-nothing) persons;

Neither have I fellowship with dissemblers.

I hate the congregation of evil-doers,

Neither will I sit with the wicked.'

¹ Ps. xxv. 5.

² Ps. xliii. 3.

We can hardly imagine a Christian putting these matters into the foreground of his prayer, at least in ordinary circumstances. But take the case of a recent convert from heathenism in Africa, exposed to danger from persecution. How natural it would be for him to adopt the language of our psalmist, or to say, in the words of the 16th psalm,—

*‘As for the saints that are in the land,
And thy noble ones, all my delight is in them’!*

For when all around tempts a man to palter with his conscience, and a false god is enthroned in the place of Jehovah, the only safety, unless duty compels us to be aggressive, is in fleeing from occasions of unfaithfulness. A man’s company becomes in such circumstances the test of his piety. And this is why in the 1st psalm, written while there was still great danger to the Church from heathenism, we read,—

*‘Happy is the man that hath not walked in the counsel
of the wicked,
Nor stood in the way of sinners,
And hath not sat in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of Jehovah,
And on his law doth he meditate day and night.’*

Plainly, this passage contains a more balanced description of a righteous character than the 26th psalm. The good man withdraws from the company of scoffers and unbelievers to delight himself in the

inspired teaching of the Scriptures. But though the 26th Psalm does not express an antithesis to sitting with the vain and the ungodly, the context enables us to supply one for ourselves. This is how the psalmist continues,—

*‘I wash mine hands in innocency ;
And (so) would I compass thine altar, Jehovah :
That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving,
And tell out all thy wonders.’*

He longs to take part one day in a great religious procession, such as we find described in the 68th psalm—a procession enlivened with happy songs of thanksgiving to a Saviour-God. In short, he gives up the ‘congregation of evil-doers’ for a far better society—that of his fellow worshippers in the temple, and, above all, of the gracious God, who in some sense dwells there.

*‘Jehovah (he says), I love the habitation of thy house,
And the place where thy glory dwelleth.’*

For the temple is now the sacramental sign of Jehovah’s presence. Between the exalted idealism to which some of the prophets inclined, and according to which temple and sacrifices were alike unworthy of Jehovah, and the inherited superstition of a literal divine inhabiting of the sanctuary on Mount Zion, a compromise, more suitable than either belief to the wants of ordinary Jewish nature, was suggested to

the leaders of the Jewish Church. It is beautifully expressed in a passage in the first book of Kings,—

*‘But will God in very deed dwell on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded! Yet . . . hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: yea, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place: and when thou hearest, forgive.’*¹

Our psalmist fully believes this; namely, that if he prays (to use an expression in the 28th psalm ‘towards the innermost part of the sanctuary,’² i.e. towards the most holy place, his prayer will assuredly be answered. And see, his simple faith in God’s appointed sign is rewarded. His recent crushing anxiety gives place to a joyous faith in the tendance of His people by the Good Shepherd.³

‘Blessed be Jehovah!

For he has heard the voice of my supplication.

Jehovah is my stronghold and my shield;

My heart trusted in him, and I was helped:

Therefore my heart danceth for joy,

And with my song will I praise him.’

This is how he speaks in the 28th psalm. In the 26th he is calmer, but not less confident. ‘*My foot*

¹ 1 Kings viii. 27–30.

² Ps. xxviii. 2; cf. v. 7.

³ See Ps. xxviii. 9.

standeth on even ground,' he says; that is, after stumbling along on the rough paths of affliction, I can walk at ease in a 'wealthy place'; and he adds, '*In the assemblies (or choirs) will I bless Jehovah*': for his joys and sorrows are those of the Church, and as he complained and lamented with his brethren, so with them he will sing and give thanks.

There is still one of the psalmist's professions to be studied. I have already quoted the striking symbolic words, '*I wash mine hands*' (he says) '*in innocency*' (Ps. xxvi. 6). How impossible it is to do without primitive forms of expression! The ceremonial washings of heathenism were supposed to have an inherent power to purify from sin. Nowhere are they more prevalent than in Japan, where Shintoism has the unique peculiarity of substituting such lustrations for sacrificial offerings. Japan, then, may at least help us to realize the force of this passage. When a Shinto worshipper approaches the shrine, he dips, we are told, with a bamboo cup, enough water to pour over his hands and cleanse his mouth, and having done this, ventures to ascend the steps and make his petition. Ancient Palestine too was no stranger to these rites. The Gospel narrative shows us that ceremonial washings, or baptisms, as they are called,¹ assumed a great importance in the time of Christ, but

¹ See the Greek of Mark vii. 4, Heb. ix. 10.

were performed in a formalistic spirit. There is no trace of such formalism however in the inspired psalmist. To him lustrations have no more inherent power of moral cleansing than sacrifices had according to the 50th and 51st psalms. If notwithstanding he performs them, he will take good care not to miss the thing signified : he will wash his hands in innocency ; that is, he will keep them free from sins—from the heinous sins referred to in Psalm xxvi. 9, 10. An easy thing, perhaps you will say, for the persecuted Jews ; for sins of violence belong to the oppressors and not to the oppressed. True ; but remember that the speaker is virtually the Jewish people, which was not always either ‘clean of hands’ or ‘pure of heart.’ Not only its greatest king (David), but its most prominent and religious citizens, had been guilty of the sin of murder,[†] which to pious Israelites seemed to pollute their land with an indelible stain.

*‘Deliver me from blood-guiltiness (says the Church in the 51st psalm), Jehovah my Saviour-God ;
And my tongue shall sing of thy righteousness.’*

It was no small thing that Israel had now purged itself from this awful guilt, and could describe its religious ideal in the searching catechism (Ps. xxiv. 3, 4), which we studied last month, and which contradicts so emphatically the antique heathen conception

[†] Cf. Isa. i. 15, lix. 3 ; Mic. iii. 10 ; Ps. v. 6, &c.

of what a recent writer has called 'practical religion.'¹

And is there not a special fitness in the mention of this symbolic washing just before the psalmist's longing to take part in a solemn Church rite? Many of us have doubtless heard of the great Mysteries at Eleusis, which were the most sacred part of the Greek religion, and in the most spiritual minds produced something like what we are accustomed to call sanctification. These Mysteries opened with a proclamation that murderers and other impious persons should depart, and with solemn lustrations performed by the devout who remained. I mention these purifications here, because the Mysteries were in a certain sense a great Church rite, and analogous therefore to the procession longed for by the psalmist. This ancient Israelite felt, like the noblest of the Greeks, that without inward purity it was presumptuous to join

¹ Mr. Grant Allen, in the article which bears this title (*Fortnightly Review*, Dec., 1889), takes no account of the regeneration of the religious sentiment by Christ and His forerunners. Ps. xxiv. 3, 4 does not stand alone. Comp. Pss. xv. and lxxiii., where 'Israel' is synonymously parallel to 'the pure in heart.' The view of these passages and of Ps. li., given above may seem to conflict with a striking paragraph in Dean Church's argument in favour of the divine guidance of the Israelites (see his *Lectures on the Psalms*). It does conflict with the letter, but not with the spirit of that paragraph. The Dean writes as if the Psalms were all of one very early period, or as if the moral character of the Israelites had no phases to pass through. The Psalms equally prove the divine guidance of Israel when studied upon different critical principles.

the band of the initiated. To sing Jehovah's praises was in his view an action equal in dignity to the offering of sacrifice ; nay, it was better than hecatombs of oxen, for, as Jehovah says in another psalm,

' Thinkest thou that I will eat bulls' flesh,

And drink the blood of goats ?

Offer unto God thanksgiving,

And pay thy vows unto the most Highest.' ¹

What a serious preparation then ought to precede this solemn act ! White robes are given in the vision of the Apocalypse to those who sing the great hymn of salvation.² And so the psalmist will wash his hands in innocency, not once only, but continually, before taking part in the Church's ritual of solemn thanksgiving. Must we not apply this to ourselves ? All healthy Christian churches follow that of Israel in the prominence which they give to praise, and their children should take the psalmist's lesson to their heart of hearts. And if the Jewish Church in the 26th psalm looks forward to a day of solemn rejoicing, when its deadly enemies shall have been crushed, have not all truly living members of the Christian Church in England an equal longing for a great future thanksgiving-day ? For our Church too is surrounded by enemies. That which we value more than life is trampled under foot by thousands of our fellow

¹ Ps. l. 13, 14, Prayer Book Version.

² Rev. vii. 9.

countrymen. The ignorant and the vicious are as truly, however unconsciously, our enemies as those persecutors were the enemies of the Jewish Church. Only we do not, like the psalmist, call down God's judgment upon those who are without. We have learned from Christ to despair of no one. The destruction we pray for is not that of sinners, but of sin. We have to add much in thought even to the more missionary psalms to make them full expressions of our spiritual aims. Let us see to it however that we fall not behind the Jewish Church in our zeal for personal purity. It is true that we cannot, strictly speaking, purify ourselves. The initial act of purification is Christ's. But for those who are justified by faith there still remains a long and earnest process to be carried out in the power of that baptism—the daily subjugation of the flesh, the daily striving onwards and upwards, the daily endeavour to walk in the blessed steps of His most holy life. A Church whose members so purified themselves could not have long to wait for the happy completion of its home-missionary work, and would be able to devote itself without distraction to the ever-broadening task of the conquest of the world for God. Blessed is he that followeth after purity, not merely for his personal salvation, but for the share that is given him in the travail of Christ's soul.

CHAPTER XI.

PSALM LXIII.¹

THE Feast of Tabernacles, important in the very earliest times, became still more endeared to the Jews by its connexion with the Maccabæan heroes. It is in the later Maccabæan age that we first hear of a custom which perhaps illustrates John vii. 37, of drawing water from the Pool of Siloam, and pouring it out as a drink-offering at the foot of the altar. The rejoicings of the multitude passed all bounds, and an ordinary teacher would perchance have despaired of winning the ear of the excited spectators. Jesus, however, with His keen eye for symbols, saw that this popular ceremony might furnish a text for one of His heart-searching appeals. Just as the priest

¹ On the date, see *B.L.*, pp. 99, 199, 468. Those who will may assume that this and the other royal psalms are based on older, pre-Exilic psalms, provided that in their present form they (especially Pss. lxi. and lxiii.) are recognized as post-Exilic.

had poured out the water from the golden pitcher at the foot of the altar (on the seventh day of the feast, the 'great Hoshianna'), Jesus stood forth and cried, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.'¹

The words presuppose that the people were accustomed to symbolism like this. And certain it is that many of those who heard them at once began to question whether this might not be the prophet who was to come in the latter days, or even the Messiah himself. I should not wonder if the idea was suggested to them by a passage from a prophetic hymn in Isaiah which was sung at the Feast of Tabernacles: '*In that day*' (i.e. probably in the Messianic age) '*ye shall draw water with joy out of the wells of salvation*' (Isa. xii. 3; cf. xlv. 3, lv. 1). Nor was the idea of spiritual thirst unexpressed in that complete devotional manual of the Jewish Church, the Psalter. Let us therefore connect our Lord's words with the first verse of the 63rd psalm, than which few of the temple-songs are more beautiful, or better reward a repeated study. This 'prayer without a petition,' as it has been called, has been a favourite with devout minds in all ages; and if we no longer use it, with St. Athanasius, as a morning hymn—for the experiences of the author were perhaps too uncommon to justify this—we may at least treasure it up as a precious jewel, to be taken

¹ See the Talmudic treatise *Succa*, 48b.

out and contemplated in our deepest and most sacred moments.

Let me first tell the story of the psalmist, which the trained eye can recover in some of its details from his own work, illustrated by a neighbouring psalm. He is one of those faithful Jews whose allegiance both to their heavenly and to their earthly king, no temporary reverses can shake. He has probably, though but a temple-singer, accompanied the royal army, which is still battling for religious and political independence. Not long ago (if the 60th psalm belongs to the same period) Jehovah 'caused his people to see hard things, and made them to drink the wine of bewilderment.' They had taken the field for the true religion ; Jehovah had, as it seemed, raised their banner, but it was only that they might flee before the bow.¹ And though some improvement in their fortunes has taken place, yet how can they pray with their wonted confidence that God will answer? Were they at home, they would go up, like Hezekiah, to the house of Jehovah, and spread the matter before the Lord. But here, in the wilderness, how can they open their parched lips save to cry aloud, and lament their distance from the God of their salvation? '*From the end of the earth,*' says one of them, '*I call unto thee with fainting heart*';² and another, '*My soul thirsteth for thee, my*

¹ Ps. lx. 3, 4 (see Ewald).

² Ps. lxi. 2.

flesh pineth for thee, in a dry and weary land, where no water is.' It is not that they are incapable of braving physical hardships, not that they cannot stand long marches or endure the pains of thirst. 'The end of the earth,' 'a dry and weary land,'—these are symbols of spiritual privations which are harder to bear than any physical ones. The speakers may, likely enough, be in a remote part of the country, and the time may be close upon midsummer, when, except in the mountains, the soil is dried up, and its deep cracks seem to gape wearily for the showers which come not. But what the sufferers miss the most is the sense of nearness to God. They long, as the second verse says, to see God's power and glory (by transposing its two clauses in the Bible version we shall see the meaning better), even as in time past they have, in some sense, gazed upon Him in the sanctuary. They have been wont to look through the forms of the ritual to the Face which shines behind them, and in so doing they have had soul-satisfying impressions of God's power and glory. They are now deprived of this privilege: but they can at least complain of their misery, and pant like the hunted gazelle to slake their thirst at the living waters.¹ They have not ceased for one moment to appropriate their share in the common Father. They can still pray, 'O God, thou art my

¹ Cf. Ps. xlii. 1.

God'; and if they seem separated from Him, they will still obey His gracious command, 'Seek ye my face.' And, lo, the answer to this 'prayer without a petition' is on its way. They wish themselves back in the sanctuary. But God will teach them how to dispense even with this most sacred means of grace. The ages are rolling on; Christ is nearer now than when David said to Nathan the prophet, 'See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within tent-curtains.'¹ It is time that men should cease to think that the presence of God can be confined in any sense, either to a tent or a house of stone. But how gently does the guiding Spirit lift Israel up to a higher point of view! A far-seeing prophet has already cried, 'What manner of house will ye build unto me (i.e. unto Jehovah)? and what place shall be my rest?'² This was too paradoxical for the Church at large to realize. But even ordinary believers might see that, though the temple-services were the highest means of grace, yet, when they were parted from them, there were compensations to be had from an all-sufficient God. And it was this that Jehovah taught His Church through a succession of psalmists after the return from the Captivity. Other temple-poets preceded our psalmist, who seems to have lived in the times of the Maccabæan princes. But God's

¹ 2 Sam. vii. 2.² Isa. lxvi. 1.

lessons need to be repeated to the Church again and again; and there were doubtless reasons why the lesson should be renewed in the time of the psalmist, who was rewarded for his thirst after God by a special outpouring of the Spirit—not for his own sake alone but for that of the Church.

How long he waited for it, we know not. It is possible that the two first verses are but a condensed record of a painful experience, such as occupies many verses in the 42nd and 43rd psalms.¹ But it is also possible that this psalmist had but a short time to wait before his unspoken petition was abundantly granted. God selects His instruments with a view to their special work. The authors of the 42nd and the 63rd psalms were both lyric poets, but the former was of a still more sensitive, and therefore still more poetic, nature than the latter. His mission was to describe with inimitable truth and beauty the pain of unsatisfied aspiration. That of his brother-poet was to contrast the agony of spiritual longing with the joy of recovered communion with God. Psalm xlii. rises no higher than a confident expectation of a return to Mount Zion; but in Psalm lxiii., as it has come down to us, we pass at once from the complaint of the thirsting to the anthem of the refreshed and

¹ There is no doubt but that these originally formed but one psalm (see Delitzsch).

rejoicing soul. The author of Psalm xlii. is great in remembering ; he ‘ pours out his soul ’ in a sad retrospect ; but our psalmist knows that there is a time to remember and also a time to forget. He forgets for a time all that is painful in his situation, and remembers only what God is permanently and essentially. From this great source of comfort he draws the assurance that God’s countenance is not really veiled, and that he can still praise God as joyfully as in the temple-choir ; and when he does remember the difficulties of his situation, he turns the thought, in the power of the new assurance which has come to him, into a prophecy of the destruction of his heathen enemies.

But it is not upon the latter part of the psalm that I would now dwell. I have already excused the bitterness which mars some of the Maccabæan psalms. It is the course taken by this thoroughly human-hearted poet to which I desire to draw attention. He rises from the thought that God is love (the thought is his, though not the very words) to the denial (implied, though not expressed) that his communion with God can be vitally affected by his absence from the temple. Love knows no barriers—least of all the divine love. Hints have already been given of a catholic Church of all nations. How should any of its worshippers—above all, Israelitish ones—be de-

barred from the fullest spiritual privileges by the accident of their habitation? What, then, can the psalmist have lost but a symbol of Jehovah's presence among His people which He who has for a time withdrawn it will not suffer him to miss? The psalmist has indeed missed it for a moment; but when he thinks of God's eternal love, he passes into a stage of experience which is independent of forms, because that which alone makes forms desirable has been obtained without them—the inward vision of God. Nay, has he not, here in the wilderness, had specially strong proofs of that which could not be learned so well in the temple—the divine lovingkindness? No doubt the pious worshipper drank in the sense of God's love in the temple; but there was a certain awfulness attached by long association to the place where the ark¹ had been, which may have weakened the impression of the divine love. The psalmist himself tells us that God's power and glory were what he had chiefly beheld in the temple services, and from the psalm which precedes this we gather that the truth of God's essential lovingkindness was, even after the return, less generally recognized in the Church than that of His absolute power.² Should not the psalmist then acquiesce in a temporary loss, without which he could not so effectually have learned that

¹ Cf. Ps. lxxviii. 60, cxxxii. 8.

² See Ps. lxii. 11, 12.

God's lovingkindness followed him all his days, and that in the highest and fullest sense he could dwell in the house of the Lord for ever? Well may he say,

*'My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness,
And my mouth praiseth thee with joyful lips.'*

Yes; it was worth while to sojourn in a thirsty land to receive such showers of blessing from the Lord of life. If God's lovingkindness is better than life itself, much more must it be better than any of those symbolic services from which the psalmist is at present parted, and to which he will return with so deep a knowledge of the truth which they symbolize? This pious man felt as if he had, not indeed lost his God, but been deprived of the privilege of immediate access to Him. He must indeed have known better than this, for psalmists before his time had at any rate suggested a doctrine on ritual almost Christian in its spirituality. But trouble had brought a film over his eye, and he could not see the new and but half-assimilated truth. Hence his restless discontent. For 'Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart remains restless until it find rest in Thee.' The most sacred forms do us harm if they step between us and the supreme object of devotion. It is well to be parted from them—it is well even to part ourselves from them—for a time, that we may the better realize the directness of the soul's relation to God and the

inexhaustible riches of His grace. For, alas ! there is such a thing as a merely formal and notional religion. Too many ritual forms are as dangerous as too many sermons. Forms and sermons are only useful to those who come to them with an unappeasable longing to get that which by nature we cannot have—filial intercourse with God. The essential is, neither to be a ritualist nor a non-ritualist, neither to hear many nor to hear few sermons, but to hunger and thirst after God. And nothing can satisfy this noble craving but experience.

And now I can return to the glorious saying of Jesus on the last day of the feast. The historical fact, that on the scene of history, once in the ages a Divine Man has appeared is a far greater proof than any which the psalmists possessed of the inconceivable love of God. They knew indeed that even greater wonders than any in the past were in store for Israel and the world in the latter days ; but they could not guess what form Jehovah's creative originality would select. Moreover they knew and loved Jeremiah's great prophecy of the new covenant ; but they could not divine how the promised blessings of forgiveness and regeneration would be conveyed to thirsting souls. We, more fortunate, do know. We have it all at our fingers' ends. But do we really know it ? Why then do we not live more in accord-

ance with these blessed truths? Were it not best to forget our poor, ineffectual, fancied knowledge, and once more become learners in the school of Jesus and His apostles? It is too often our fatal familiarity with modern religious phrases which hinders us from getting to the root of religious truth. The best remedy for educated persons is the historical and yet devotional study of the Scriptures, and more especially of the gospels. I cannot be too earnest in impressing this: the life of Christ, historically studied, is at once the best evidence of Christianity and the unfailing source of new impulses to repentance and faith. Follow Jesus as He moves about, healing bodies and souls, in the narrow streets of Eastern towns and villages; follow Him from the manger to the cross and to the opening tomb. Believe that He was not less the Son of man because he claimed to be the Son of God, and that what He was 1800 years ago He still is.

* What if Thy form we cannot see?
We know and feel that Thou art here.*

Come to Him when He calls the weary and heavy-laden to His side—if at least you feel yourself to belong to this class. Come to Him when He says, ‘If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink’—if at least you feel that the words ‘any man’

cover your own case ; for how should you open your lips to drink, if you are not athirst ? True life, which in that Eastern book the Bible is compared to sweet, fresh water, consists in likeness to God. If you do not thirst for this God-likeness, which consists in ‘doing always those things that please’ God, how should you drink of the life-giving water which the Son of God brings ?

‘Ye believe in God,’ said Jesus, ‘believe also in me.’ The psalmists *did* believe in God ; they thirsted for new life, and so God gave it them—how, they knew not, save that it was through His abundant loving-kindness, and that it was the first-fruits of the new covenant of Jeremiah’s prophecy. And if we believe in God as they did, and cry to Him as they did, ‘O God, thou art my God : teach me to do the thing that pleaseth thee,’ He will assuredly respond to us as He did to the holy psalmists, and still more clearly to His own first disciples. The great want, both of the world and of the Church, is this—to believe more earnestly in God. It would be untrue to say that we do not believe at all. Faith is not dead, but sleepeth. We do believe, but intermittently. We do in our best moments wish to please God, but we do not give thought enough to the manifold difficulties which hinder the accomplishment of the wish. We do not draw upon the magnificent

resources so freely placed at our disposal—resources of ‘wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.’ We have faith, but not that which worketh, which energizeth, by love. If we had—if, for instance, in those social and religious difficulties which so strikingly characterize our times, we leaned more constantly and avowedly on the help of the Divine Spirit of wisdom, would there have been such disputes between capital and labour as those which so lately saddened the bright summer weather? and would such important sections of our population be in part or altogether alienated from the Christian Church?

Let us then put more earnestness into our religious life. When we have time to think our own deepest thoughts, we do crave for that which is far better than all earthly excitement—the joy of the experience of Christ’s love. When the world leaves us free, and the outer noises are still, our heart does throb in response to the psalmist’s cry, ‘O God, thou art my God, earnestly do I seek thee.’ Let us then dare to be ourselves more constantly, and make it our one ambition (as St. Paul says¹) to be well-pleasing unto Christ. No difficulties need be too great for us; ‘for of his fulness,’ says an evangelist, ‘have all we received, and grace for

¹ 2 Cor. v. 9 (Rev. Ver., margin).

grace.' Let us not consider ourselves excused for the weakness of our spiritual pulse by the demands of business. It is possible to hallow those dry details which no hard worker can escape by the thought that we are placed where we are for a moral purpose by the holy will of God.

‘ There are in this loud stunning tide
Of human care and crime
With whom the melodies abide
Of the everlasting chime ;
Who carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet,
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.’¹

Would you know this holy strain ? The psalmists can give you the words, but the music must come from within your soul. ‘ Sing unto the Lord a new song ’ ; for when has the experience of two souls been altogether alike ? We are born into the world of nature alone, and alone we are born into the world of grace. Special mercies need special gratitude. The music of the soul is like the ‘ new name, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.’ My God must ‘ open my lips,’ and give me the new song, before my tongue can rightly ‘ show forth his praise.’

And what is it that cheers the tired worker when

¹ Keble, *Christian Year* : ‘ St. Matthew the Apostle.’

the melodies of the holy strain sound faintly within him? This simple thought : that in heaven his thirst after goodness and righteousness, and after Him who is their living image, will be filled. 'Thy lovingkindness,' said the psalmist, 'is better than life itself'; of course, for life at its best is but an imperfectly transparent veil, on the other side of which 'just men made perfect' have an immediate perception of the glory of God in Christ. Strictly speaking, indeed, 'the eye is not satisfied with seeing,' even in heaven. Aspiration will still be the glory of those who have been born into the better life. But the thirst of heaven will have no trace of pain in it. It will be simply the sense that for ages upon ages we shall still be able to make fresh discoveries of the greatness and goodness of our King, and of the beauty and wisdom of His works. We shall only thirst because the 'wells of salvation' are too deep to exhaust, because that Feast of Tabernacles will never come to an end. But our thirst will not check the stream of our melody. 'The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'¹

¹ Isa. xxxv. 10.

CHAPTER XII.

PSALM LXVIII.¹

*'LET God arise, let his enemies be scattered ;
And let them that hate him flee before him.'*

These words and those which follow, in the striking old French version, formed a war-song of the Huguenots, those Maccabees of Reformed Christianity. The psalm was not indeed intended as a war-song ; from the beginning to the end the only fighter mentioned is that invincible one, Jehovah Sabáoth. But who can blame these heroes for so employing the *Exsurgat Deus* ? Never in modern times have there been soldiers of such steadfast faith as the Huguenots (except it be Cromwell's Ironsides), and so deeply possessed with the truth that the best equipments of war are of no avail without the help of God. The spirit of the psalms had passed into

¹ Comp. *B.L.*, pp. 113, 114, 175, 475.

their lives, and though we may not read the psalms precisely as they read them, yet it would be an object worthy of a Chrysostom to make English people sympathize more with the Huguenot feeling towards the Psalter. It is true, the modern Chrysostom will have a harder task than his predecessor ; for unless he has assimilated the method and the best results of criticism, he will not be competent to teach those who most need to be taught. Somewhere perhaps he is even now passing through his varied discipline, human and divine ; and while we are waiting for him, let us listen to the golden-tongued preacher of Antioch, as he stirs up the indolent Christians of his own day to a more intelligent use of the treasures of the Psalter.

‘The words of this psalm are universally known ; men continue to sing them all through life, but they know not the meaning of the things spoken. One may justly find fault with those who sing the same words every day, but do not investigate the thoughts which are stored up in them. And yet if any one saw a pure and limpid water, he could not refrain from going near, and touching and drinking it ; or if he frequented a meadow, he could not bear to leave it without gathering a few flowers. But you who, from your earliest age to your latest years, practise this psalm, are content to know the words

alone, and sit by a hidden treasure, and carry about a sealed purse, and not one of you is moved by curiosity to acquaint himself with that which is said. Nor can you excuse your sleep by the clearness of the meaning ; for it is most unclear.' ¹

St. Chrysostom is speaking of the 141st psalm, the ordinary evening psalm of the Eastern Church. But his words may still be applied, though I hope in a less degree, to many of the psalms which Anglican Churchmen at any rate repeat in their daily services. Do not let us accuse the great preacher of austerity. St. Chrysostom held up no impossible standard. He was not a mere cloistered cenobite ; he studied men as well as books, and sympathized with the difficulties of the various classes of his people. In expounding another psalm (xlii.) he earnestly recommends his hearers to be constantly repeating the psalms, both at home and in their walks abroad, as a preservative against temptation, even if they do not understand the meaning of the words. 'For,' he says, 'the tongue is sanctified by the words when they are spoken with a well-disposed mind.' It is clear, however, that he only makes this concession to beginners in the hallowed practice of psalmody ; for elsewhere he is urgent on the necessity of both praying and singing praise with the understanding, and reckons it

¹ *Hom. in Ps. cxl. (cxli.)*

among the advantages of true psalmody that it does not require the aid of the tongue. This, St. Chrysostom thinks, is what the psalmist means by the words, 'Bless Jehovah, O my soul'; for it is only too easy, as he can sadly testify, for the spirit to flag in accompanying the sacred words.

The 68th psalm is one of those which most require explanation for the ordinary reader. Slowly and gradually have trained students been penetrating its historical sense; and it is not surprising that teachers who have drawn their views of its meaning from an uncritical tradition should have cast but little light upon it, and that mostly deceptive. Were I addressing a Church Congress instead of the wider Christian public, I should endeavour to excuse the backwardness of preachers and of the accredited Church literature in the exposition of psalms like the 68th. I should point out that the wants of the Church are so varied, and the number of subjects pressing for recognition in theological examinations so large, that we can hardly be surprised if a comparatively new subject like the historical study of the psalms fails to make its existence adequately realized. But I should add that in our cathedrals and other scarcely less important churches an example ought to be set both by those who preach and by those who hear: by those who preach in devoting more study than

formerly to the historical meaning of the psalms, and developing a legitimate Christian meaning out of this ; and by those who hear in absorbing fresh knowledge and making it fruitful for their own Bible study. For instance, the Church of England attaches great weight to the 68th psalm, which it appoints to be said or sung, not only once a month in the ordinary course, but on Whitsunday. But must not an open-minded clergyman anxiously ask, how far and in what sense this psalm can any longer be set apart for that high day? Historical criticism was hardly yet in its infancy when the English Reformers compiled or rearranged the Prayer Book, and it is perfectly conceivable that we might have to make on their behalf a confession of error. Let us examine into the circumstances of the case ; more than merely Anglican Church interests are concerned.

From the very outset we must regard this psalm in its true light as a grand historical ode, one of those to which we can most confidently appeal in confirmation of the theory that the Old Testament is a literature. There are indeed other historical psalms—psalms with a wide sweep of historical reference—but they are didactic ; whereas in the 68th the glories of the past and the hopes and fears of the present are fused together by the central fire of a deeply stirred emotion. The psalm falls into two parts, dividing at

ver. 19. The first four verses consist of an appeal to Jehovah to deliver Israel, and a summons to the people to prepare for His coming. Then begins a magnificent historical retrospect. The psalmist can look back upon two great returns of the Israelites to Canaan ; and if he lays much more stress upon one than upon the other, it is because the return from Egypt was the consecrated type both of that from Babylon and of that which, even after the second return, fervent Israelites craved (see ver. 22) from the distant lands of the Dispersion. In ver. 6 however the psalmist clearly refers to the fulfilment of the great prophecy of the Second Isaiah. He says :

*‘ God maketh the desolate to return home ;
He bringeth out the prisoners into prosperity :
But the rebellious dwell in a parched land.’*

Here the ‘ parched land ’ is Babylon, where the refreshing streams which flow from Zion are unknown ; the ‘ desolate ’ and the ‘ prisoners ’ are those who, unlike the careless or rebellious Israelites, feel their privations, and long to return to their soul’s true home. Observe, the psalmist generalizes from the facts of Israel’s experience of God’s redeeming love at Babylon. He who so gloriously interposed to deliver His people will surely do so again. Israel personified can still most truly say,

*‘For thy sake I have borne reproach ;
Shame hath covered my face.’*¹

And though at present his destruction as a nation seems, humanly speaking, certain, he—that is, the righteous who constitute the true Israel—can ‘rejoice and triumph’ before the God whose victorious advent they anticipate. We shall see later on what extraordinary faith the jubilant words of vers. 3, 4 imply.

In vers. 7–18 we have a highly poetic sketch of the journey through the wilderness, the conquest of Canaan, and the occupation of Mount Zion by the great King. It is gemmed with fine quotations from ancient songs, one of which we still possess in full ; it is the Song of Deborah in Judges v. These quotations do not always carry their meaning on their front ; all the more they stimulate us to think. And if we do spend a little thought upon them, we shall be rewarded. We shall not indeed find Scripture proofs of Christian doctrine, or suitable texts for missionary sermons and addresses. It is an ideal world in which, fancy-free, the poet roams. Attended by His hosts, Jehovah transfers His holy habitation from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion. There are the hosts of heaven, ‘*chariots of God, many myriads, thousands upon thousands*’ (ver. 17) ; and there are the hosts of earth, as weak as those of heaven are strong, and yet

¹ Ps. lxi. 7.

the special objects of Jehovah's protecting care. It is for them that He leaves the most ancient of the mounts of God, where already He has appeared unto Moses, and where, as an exceptional favour, the fugitive prophet Elijah was again to find Him in years to come, and to witness that divine acted parable, the depths of which he failed perhaps to fathom. Long since indeed Jehovah had chosen Canaan to be His inheritance; but not till the tribes of Jacob were ready to become the people of the true God did Canaan become, in fact as well as in right, the Holy Land. And when did the tribes of Israel become Jehovah's people, and Jehovah become Israel's God? At the giving of the law.¹ Then it was that, as the psalmist says, quoting from the Song of Deborah, '*even yon Sinai trembled at the presence of God, the God of Israel*' (ver. 8); or, in the words of the story in Exodus, '*there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount,*' and when Jehovah came down, '*the whole mount quaked greatly*' (Exod. xix. 16, 18). These were the symbols of that sterner side of the divine nature which was most prominent to the early men. But was there no evidence of a gentler aspect as well? Yes; '*the heavens,*' as the poet tells us, '*dropped (with water),*' and the rain which was lost upon the peaks of Sinai, fell in

¹ See Deut. xxxiii. 2-5.

gracious, fertilizing abundance on the land of Canaan.

*'Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain,
Thou didst restore thine inheritance, when it was weary.
Thy congregation (or, thine army) dwelt therein (i.e. in
Canaan) ;*

*In thy goodness, O God, thou didst prepare for the
poor' (vers. 9, 10).*

Next we have a scene from the early wars of the Israelites with the Canaanitish kings.

*'The Lord giveth the word ;
The women that publish the tidings are a great host'
(ver. 11).*

The Lord Himself, that is, raises the battle-cry ; victory follows, and choruses of singing women celebrate the event among all the tribes of Israel.

The next three verses may be a fragment from one of the songs which these gifted women chanted.

Ver. 15 places us among the Israelites warring with Og, the king of Bashan. That highland region has its sacred mountains, not less than Arabia. And the poet, somewhat like the author of the ascension fragment which we studied not long since in the 24th psalm, who endows palace-gates with the faculty of speech, represents the grand mountain-range of Bashan as casting jealous eyes at the little mountain which Jehovah has prepared on the other side of Jordan. For at length, though the details are

omitted, the poet would have us understand that the triumphal march is finished. The mighty Warrior, with His chariots of angels, *'hath come (as ver. 17 says) from Sinai into the sanctuary.'* And the poet concludes the first part of the ode with the cry of praise,—

*'Thou hast gone up to the height to abide ;
Jehovah, thou hast carried away captives ; thou hast
received gifts.*

*Among men, yea, even among the rebellious.'*¹

The height which Jehovah ascends is clearly not the heavenly, but the earthly sanctuary ; for we are told that He carries with Him His 'captives,' and the 'gifts' or 'tribute' which He has received among men, no longer 'rebellious' to His will. And the comfort which the psalmist draws from his now completed historical retrospect is, that Jehovah's residence on Mount Zion will not be of as short a duration as that on Mount Sinai, but that He has ascended up on high to abide. Twice within these verses this significant word 'abide' is used with reference to Jehovah ; and since He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, the victory which was the prelude to His royal entrance into Jerusalem was a prophecy of many another victory in times to come.

¹ In justification of this rendering, I cannot help referring to my commentary (1888).

In what sense can the Christian use this part of the psalm? It is of course edifying to see how a religious Jewish poet read his nation's history; but is there any distinctively Christian, and more especially any Whitsuntide, application that we can make of these verses? A simple-minded reader of the New Testament will perhaps reply by pointing to that most beautiful exhortation to unity in the fourth chapter of Ephesians, where the apostle illustrates the truth that all spiritual gifts come from one God through one Mediator by quoting the eighteenth verse of our psalm in an incorrect form, using the liberty then, even more than now, accorded to a preacher. But though, as we sing the psalm, we may sometimes recall with interest this passage in Ephesians, we cannot, as thinking men, justify the Whitsuntide use of this psalm by St. Paul's inaccurate quotation. It may perhaps help us to remember that this was one of the special psalms for the Jewish day of Pentecost. That festival was held in later times to commemorate the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, and Psalm lxviii. was doubtless connected with the feast on account of its description of the awful phenomena reported in the twentieth of Exodus, when the people trembled and stood afar off, for they were afraid to meet God.¹

¹ Exod. xx. 18, 19.

But the Christian Feast of Pentecost commemorates a greater event than the giving of the Decalogue—even that mighty inspiration by which the apostles, as representatives of the Church, were fitted to continue Christ's work in Christ's spirit. And I think that we may find an anticipation of this second and greater coming of God in the latter verses of this section of the ode. Jehovah has not come down for a time only, with thunder and lightning and earthquake, but to abide, as the Author of peace and the Father of mercies, for evermore in His temple. And what, from a Christian point of view, is His temple? A material building? No: the Church of Christ, and therefore each member of that Church, in so far as he is one with Christ by faith.

At this point (ver. 19) the second part begins in the language of benediction.

'Blessed be the Lord!

Day by day he beareth us (or, beareth our burden),

Even the God who is our salvation.'

A different strain this from—

'Blessed be Jehovah my Rock!

Who teacheth my hands to war,

*And my fingers to fight.'*¹

The poet who wrote these words lived at a time

¹ Ps. cxliv. 1.

when Israel, full of martial prowess, could fight for the accomplishment of God's purposes. But now Israel is too feeble, too depressed, to dream of self-defence, and if God does not soon interpose, will be torn in pieces by the ruthless potentates who are contending over his body. The psalmist's function is to keep alive the spirit of trust in God. Outwardly Israel may have been brought very low, but inwardly he has still cause enough for soaring on the wings of faith. There are in fact two Israels: the one which is 'despised and rejected of men'; the other which is invisibly borne up on angels' wings, lest he dash his foot against a stone. And corresponding to these two Israels, we find two classes of utterances in the Psalter, one which is represented by the words,

*'How long, Jehovah, wilt thou forget me for ever?'*¹ and the other by the courageous profession of faith in ver. 20 of our psalm,—

*'God is unto us a God of deliverances;
And unto Jehovah the Lord belong the issues from death.'*

Israel's God has not lost His ancient strength, nor has He 'forgotten to be gracious.' Still does He direct the affairs of His people from His holy hill of Zion; still does He grant new prophetic revelations, or disclose the present meaning of the old. One of

¹ Ps. xiii. 1.

these old or new oracles points to a great restoration of Jewish exiles, preceding an awful judgment upon Jehovah's enemies (see vers. 21-23). From this the poet draws fresh hope, and he still further encourages himself by the proofs which the well-attended festival processions of his day supply of the unbroken connexion between God and His Church.

*'They have seen thy goings, O God,
Even the goings of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.'*

And then follows a description of the procession. The singers and players upon instruments take the lead, surrounded by damsels, like Miriam, playing on timbrels. After this comes the laity in general. Four tribes only take part, two belonging to Judæa, and two to Galilee—the two provinces into which the Jewish territory was divided in the post-Exile period.

*'Then went little Benjamin before,
The chiefs of Judah in its bands,
The chiefs of Zebulun, the chiefs of Naphtali'* (ver. 27).

The tribe of Benjamin was always a small one—hence the epithet 'little,' which has no mystic reference, as the Fathers uncritically supposed,¹ to the Apostle Paul. The 'chiefs' (or, princes) are the elders, one or more of whom would naturally precede the representatives of each district. But there was One invisibly present, without whom the procession

¹ So even Theodoret.

would have lost its sanctity. In the olden days, the ark would have been carried at the head of the procession, the ark which was revered as the material pledge of Jehovah's presence. But those who devoutly used the psalms could not possibly want what had only been given for a time for the hardness of men's hearts. They knew that God was everywhere present, though they could not see Him, and more specially present in the assemblies of the Church. Hence the poet boldly ventures on the phrase 'thy goings,' just as if the Lord, according to the prophecy of Malachi, had suddenly come in person to His temple.¹

Encouraged by the vigorous church-life thus exemplified, the psalmist rises into the tone of prayer. May He who has again and again 'wrought' for Israel 'strengthen' His work in our day (ver. 28)! And now, instead of picturing the routed enemy overtaken by God's just vengeance, as in the two opening verses, a new and more blessed vision passes before his eyes. It is a new sort of religious procession which he sees—distant kings hastening to Jerusalem with presents for the King of kings. But how can this be realized while Israel's land is no better than a football to the great rival kings of Egypt and Syria—the Ptolemies and the Seleucidæ,

¹ Mal. iii. 1.

of whom we read in veiled language in the eleventh chapter of the book of Daniel? Hence the poet utters an earnest prayer for the humiliation of these proud heathen kingdoms. 'The wild beast of the reeds' (not 'the company of the spearmen') means Egypt, whose symbol was leviathan; while 'the troop of bulls . . . that delight in silver,' refers to the mercenaries of various nations who fought on the side of Egypt (see note, p. 341). When these proud empires have been 'rebuked,' i.e. restrained and humiliated, then will Israel be at liberty to assume its peaceful, educational functions for the nations of the world. Then will the bold predictions of the Second Isaiah be fulfilled; Egypt and Ethiopia shall become the voluntary vassals of Israel: '*After thee shall they go, and in chains pass over; and unto thee shall they bow down, unto thee shall they pray, Of a truth in thee is God; and there is none else, no Godhead at all.*'¹ For the chains, as any one must see, are those of affectionate reverence, by which these noble proselytes are linked to those who unfold to them the way of truth. Or, as the psalmist puts it—

*'(Then) shall they come in haste out of Egypt;
Quickly shall Ethiopia stretch out her hands unto
God.'*

¹ Isa. xlv. 14; cf. xliii. 3.

The psalmist is not in the mood for following out the train of thought naturally suggested by this prospect. We shall see in a subsequent Study how another temple-singer treats the grand theme of the conversion of the nations. With the thought of Ethiopia stretching out her hands unto God our poet closes what I may call the historical part of the ode. His fears for Israel's future are allayed. He has 'considered the days of old, and the years that are past.' He has reflected on the many proofs of Israel's present devotion to its God. He has presented the Church's earnest prayer, and, relying on the unchangeableness of the divine nature, he can have no doubt as to the result.

The 68th psalm is a poem of grandly wide compass, and reveals no ordinary degree of art. The singing-robcs of David were taken up by some who almost equalled him in gifts, and far surpassed him in culture. The psalm is also a fine monument of post-Exile religion. It shows us how, even in dark days, when ruin menaced from without, and inward moral decay was visible in the highest family of the State, there was still a Church of true believers, who read their past history in the light of their religion, and were encouraged by it to wait patiently, and even rejoicingly, for their God. We have seen how we may still repeat the first part of the ode at Whit-

suntide, and we shall, I think, agree that the missionary prospect with which the second part closes makes it equally fit with the first for our Christian Pentecost-day. It is the missionary idea which prompts the grand thanksgiving which concludes the psalm, and in which all nations of the earth are summoned to join.

*'O kingdoms of the earth, sing ye unto God,
Make ye melody unto the Lord' (ver. 32).*

For the conversion of Egypt and Ethiopia, anticipated in ver. 31, is but like the first droppings of a shower. The words of another psalmist,

*'All nations whom thou hast made
Shall come and worship before thee, Jehovah,
And shall glorify thy name,'¹*

have found an echo in our poet's heart. His summons to all the heathen nations to glorify God for His deliverance of Israel implies that they have at least understood that Israel is to be the first-born among many brethren, and that in Abraham's seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. They have, in short, received into their hearts the germ of the true religion. Inwardly as well as outwardly the power of heathenism has been broken. 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our God,'—it remains for the Christian to add—'and of His

¹ Ps. lxxxvi. 9.

Christ.' Can we not, then, without the least unfaithfulness to historical truth and to sound Biblical interpretation, continue to read and to repeat the 68th psalm in the services of the Christian Church?

NOTE.—Partly following Professor Nestle, I would correct ver. 30 thus :—

*' Rebuke the wild beast of the reeds, the troop of bulls,
The lords of peoples from Pathros ;
[Punish] them that delight in silver,
Scatter the peoples that have pleasure in wars.'*

(See my article, *Journal of Biblical Literature and Exegesis*, June, 1892.)

CHAPTER XIII.

PSALM LXXXVI.¹

THE 86th psalm, though ascribed in the heading to David, forms a strong contrast to those admitted into the earliest 'Davidic' collection (Psalms iii.-xxxii., xxxiv.-xli.). These poems, which, with the addition of three others, the Jews called the first book of psalms, have a freshness of style and, in some cases, a plausibly supposed appropriateness to moments in the life of David, which justify the title Davidic. But this poem, if poem it can be called, is not the work of an accomplished singer,² but a piece of literary mosaic, expressing the thoughts and aspirations of average members of the Church in phrases already familiar by liturgical use. It would not be difficult to go through the psalm,

¹ See *B.L.*, pp. 119, 479.

² 'Prayer of David' is a most unhappy title, suggested, no doubt, by the occurrence in the psalm of expressions taken from the earlier 'Davidic' Psalter.

pointing out the probable sources from which almost every verse was drawn. So true it is, that even ordinary intellects may be so honoured by the Spirit's guidance as to produce something which the Church will never forget. And may I not illustrate this by some of our own hymns, which owe their well-deserved popularity less to any slight poetical merits than to their close following of the great lines of spiritual experience ?

Our psalmist has no mere head-knowledge of that experience. He clings to those foundation-truths which are the only consolations in time of trouble. There is not much consecutiveness in his writing. He tells the Church for what it most needs to pray, and upon what grounds, not for God's sake, but for its own, it ought to base its petitions. He speaks, not in his private capacity, but as a Churchman. Even where, as in the words, 'Give thy strength unto thy servant, and help the son of thine handmaid' (ver. 16), he may seem to refer to his own pious education, he is really thinking of his spiritual mother the Church, for the accompanying complaint and petition need a reference to the Church to justify them.

*'O God, the proud are risen up against me,
And a congregation¹ of violent men have sought after
my soul,*

¹ Kay renders 'faction.'

And have not set thee before them.

Show me a token for good,

That they who hate me may see it and be ashamed.'

Those were the happy times when 'Church' and 'nation' were synonymous terms. True, the awful sin of apostasy had already raised its head in Jehovah's inheritance. But those 'proud' and 'violent' men, who are again referred to in other psalms,¹ especially the 119th, were self-excluded from the Israelitish community. The psalmist could have said of them what St. John said of the early heretics: 'They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.'² And for some time past the faithful worshippers had been accustomed to use the solemn interrogatories of the 15th and the 24th psalms, describing the qualities which Jehovah required in those who would be guests in His pavilion, and rise up in His holy place.³ Indeed, in this very psalm the Churchman is taught to pray, not only,

Incline thine ear, for I am poor and needy' (ver. 1), but, 'Preserve thou my soul; for I can trace in myself the chief note of the character which thou, O God, requirest' (ver. 2).

Let us pause a little on the second verse, to which

¹ Cf. Pss. xix. 13; liv. 3; cxix. 21, &c.

² 1 John ii. 19.

³ Pss. xv. 1; xxiv. 3.

I have referred. Both the Bible and the Prayer Book version make the psalmist say, '*Preserve thou my soul, for I am holy*'; and St. Augustine unsuspectingly remarks, 'Who can be the speaker of these words but the Sinless One, who took the form of a servant, and through whom, and through whom alone, the sanctified, that is, the baptized members of the Church, can dare to repeat them?' But, as we can see from the Revised Version, the ground of the psalmist's appeal is, not something which he has received, but something which he is. It may be true—it *is* true—that not even the least motion towards God can the soul make without a prior motion of God towards us. But the psalmist is not regarding himself from this high and heavenly point of view. He says, according to the Revised Version, '*Preserve thou my soul, for I am godly*'; or, since no single word will express the meaning, '*Preserve thou my soul, for to thy covenant-love I respond with a feebleness but still sincere covenant-love of my own.*' You see, it is not the state of holiness to which the psalmist lays claim, but the overmastering affection of moral love, the same in kind as that of which he is conscious towards his brother Israelites, and in some degree towards his brother men. To a good Israelite there is no boastfulness implied in such a claim as the psalmist's. Whom should he love but

Jehovah, who has granted Israel a ‘covenant ordered in all things and sure,’ a covenant based on the pre-supposition that those who desire its benefits are bound by practical love to each other, and, both as individuals and as a community, by worshipping and obedient love to Jehovah? Israel’s proudest title is that he is one that loves, not vaguely and at random, but supported by the profound consciousness of duty. ‘Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength.’¹ This is the duty ; and here is the reward :

‘Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him :

I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.’²

Observe, it is not, Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore I also will love him. By nature, Israel was not worthy to be loved ; and if, in spite of this, Jehovah loved him, it was for the sake of the fathers,³ especially Abraham the ‘friend of God.’ But now, after the lapse of ages, a regenerate Israel is learning to love God ; the title ‘Jehovah’s friend,’ so gloriously borne by Abraham, can be given by a psalmist to faithful Israelites. ‘O friends of Jehovah,’ he says, ‘hate the evil thing.’⁴ And this is really implied in

¹ Deut. vi. 5.

² Ps. xci. 14.

³ Exod. ix. 6 ; Deut. iv. 37, x. 15 ; cf. Rom. xi. 28.

⁴ Ps. xcvi. 10.

the title assumed by the typical Churchman in the 86th psalm, 'Preserve thou my soul, for I am one that loves.' For Jehovah too is 'one that loves.'

*'Righteous is Jehovah in all his ways,
And loving (or kind) in all his works.'* ¹

Consequently the relation between Jehovah and the true Israel—the Israel which is not stiff-necked, but yields to the soft guidance of Jehovah's eye²—is a sublimation of human friendship. Yes ; just as God leads the child through the happy experience of human fatherhood to the enrapturing conception and experience of a Divine Father, so through the pearl of human friendship He would have us form some dim but truthful idea of that pearl of great price, the divine friendship.

To me this verse seems transfigured, when understood as an appeal from one friend to another. I do not forget the more awful aspects of the divine nature ; there are times when it is natural and right to dwell upon them. But for a happy Christian life we need to dwell predominantly on the softer picture of our God presented to us by and in Christ. God is our friend. He knows our wants (our real wants) better than we do ourselves, and He has the will and the power to relieve them. We will not say to Him, 'Preserve thou my soul ; for, through Christ, I am

¹ Ps. cxlv. 17.

² Ps. xxxii. 8, 9.

holy and acceptable unto thee,' but rather, as that noble 16th psalm says, 'Preserve thou me, for I have no good beyond thee,' or, as our psalm, when rightly understood, expresses it, 'Preserve me, for I am one of thy circle of friends.'¹ There is nothing arrogant in this. God in the olden time offered this friendship to every true Israelite ; and in these happy Christian days He offers it to every child of man.

' I say to thee, do thou repeat
To the first man thou mayest meet
In lane, highway, or open street,

That he and we and all men move
Under a canopy of love,
As broad as the blue sky above':²

or, in the words of our psalmist :

' (That) *thou, O Lord, art good and ready to forgive,
And rich in lovingkindness unto all them that call
upon thee.*'

You will see that I have had to amend one word even in the Revised Version of this passage ; following the American Revisers, I have changed 'mercy' into 'lovingkindness.' Both are gentle words, and fill the air with benediction. But the psalmists draw a deeply felt distinction between them, and to obliterate it is to spoil many psalms, and especially the

¹ Ps. xxv. 14 may be rendered, 'The intimacy of Jehovah is for them that fear him.'

² Trench.

86th, the keynote of which is lovingkindness. Do but observe how ever and anon this sweet word or its adjective drops from the writer's pen. 'Preserve thou my soul, for I am one that loves.' 'Thou, Jehovah, art rich in lovingkindness.' 'Great is thy lovingkindness towards me.' 'Thou, O Lord, art a God rich in lovingkindness and truth.' I have pointed out how the first of these passages is marred by an imperfect rendering. But the three other verses from which I have quoted have suffered equally. And even Jeremy Taylor, great alike as a saint and as a prose-poet, has in some respects marred two of his gorgeous sermons, nominally based on ver. 5 of this psalm, by not seeing that this is one of the group of psalms of lovingkindness. All that he can find in this text is 'miracles of the divine *mercy*.' Listen to his solemn word-music.

'Man having destroyed that which God delighted in, that is, the beauty of his soul, fell into an evil portion, and being seized upon by the Divine Justice grew miserable, and condemned to an incurable sorrow. . . . God's eye watched him; His Omniscience was man's accuser, His Severity was the Judge, His Justice the Executioner. . . . In the midst of these sadnesses, God remembered His own creature, and pitied it, and by His Mercy rescued him from the hand of His Power, and the Sword of

His Justice, and the guilt of his punishment, and the disorder of his sin. . . . It was Mercy that preserved the noblest of God's creatures here below ; he who stood condemned and undone under all the other attributes of God, was only saved and rescued by His Mercy ; that it may be evident that God's Mercy is above all His works, and above all ours, greater than the Creation, and greater than our sins. . . . And God's Justice bowed down to His Mercy, and all His Power passed into Mercy, and His Omniscience converted into care and watchfulness, into Providence and observation for man's avail ; and heaven gave its influence for man, and rained showers for our food and drink ; and the attributes and acts of God sat at the feet of Mercy, and all that mercy descended upon the head of man.'¹

This is what the great preacher means by 'miracles of the divine mercy,' and supposes to be in the mind of the writer of the 86th psalm. Well, 'miracles' the psalmist certainly does refer to. He says in ver. 10,

*'Thou art great, and doest wondrous things,
Thou art God alone' ;*

and in ver. 15, he refers to the divine mercy,

'Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion (i.e. merciful) and gracious.'

But, as I have said, the divine 'mercy' is not fore-

¹ *Sermons* (1678), p. 383.

most in the writer's mind ; God's 'miracles' are to him miracles of lovingkindness. Nor is Jeremy Taylor's idea of the divine 'mercy' the only admissible nor, for ordinary Christians, the most wholesome one. If you feed upon the view of truth presented in this fine passage till it colours your inmost nature, you will no doubt gain a grand, a simple, and a concentrated Christian character, but the moral tension in which you live will communicate to your bearing a certain hardness which will contrast unfavourably with the gentleness of the gracious Master. It is well sometimes to say and to feel the words :

‘ Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask ;
This is my humble prayer ;
For mercy, Lord, is all my suit,
O let Thy mercy spare.’

For, as another psalmist says,

‘ *God is a righteous Judge,*

Yea, a God that hath indignation every day’ ;¹

and, looking at ourselves apart from Christ and His Spirit, we can have no hope of acquittal. But as soon as we admit into our mind the idea of the divine covenant, the conceptions of ‘justice’ and ‘mercy’ become transfigured, and ‘shine with something of celestial light.’ All that fine passage of Jeremy Taylor then becomes simply a description of

¹ Ps. vii. 11 (Revised Version).

what God and man would respectively be apart from that succession of covenants which both Old and New Testament writers trace in the very earliest age of history. There never was a time when God's name was any other than Love ; man might not know the covenant, or might know it but vaguely, and yet from the foundation of the world the relation of God to man was the same as it is now through the eternal Word. Nor can it be said that the first covenants were merely legal covenants. Oh no ; there are germs of the Gospel in the book of Genesis, and even if the eyes of the early men could but dimly see them, yet God seeth not as man seeth, and 'with Him is no variableness.'

To realize this is the secret of an equable and serene Christian temper. God's 'righteousness' now becomes His consistent and undeviating adherence to His revealed purpose of salvation. 'He is faithful and just' (or, righteous), as St. John says, 'to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' 'Spare us, good Lord,' may be paraphrased by another psalmist's words, 'Think upon the covenant.' And God's 'mercy' now becomes something very different from that clemency which, in consideration of human weakness an omnipotent King may extend to His erring subjects. The word needs rather to be expanded into '*tender* mercy,' so as to

form a fit accompaniment to '*lovingkindness*,'¹ according to that sweet saying of the 103rd psalm in the common version, 'Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies' (ver. 4). For it suggests, or ought to suggest, not the narrowness of our escape from a punishment too awful for words, but that yearning of a father over his child, the suppression of which would be, not only unmerciful, but a breach of an eternal covenant. There are some things which are beyond even God's omnipotence, and one of these is the withholding of love from any single child of man. Or rather, there is, according to Biblical religion, no such thing as omnipotence; there is only a strong, righteous, wise, everlasting love²—a love which has bound itself to shrink from no effort in order to bring the beloved object into moral union with itself. Such love has an enthralling power; 'the love of Christ constraineth us,' or, as St. John says, according to the undoubtedly correct revised version, 'We love (no need to say whom), because he first loved us.' We cannot from the nature of the case return God's 'mercy,' except in deeds of mercy to those who are in greater need than ourselves. But we can return

¹ The A.V. of Ps. cxvii. 2, cxix. 76, produces the alternative 'merciful kindness'; in Ps. cxix. 77, the Prayer Book renders, for 'mercies' or 'compassions,' 'loving mercies.' Both fine, but confusing the synonyms.

² Cf. Tennyson's beautiful line, 'Strong Son of God, immortal Love.'

His love. Looking upon God in Christ, not as an awful King, far away and uninterested in our small concerns, but as a Friend, as close to us as our own soul is to our body, a Friend, who has made known His high purposes to us, and given us the inestimable privilege and power of forwarding them, how can we but love Him?

And shall we not even love those passages of the Psalms which give us an insight into the loving heart of Jehovah, and supply a chaste and yet fervent expression for our own responsive feeling—love them with a love which will take some trouble to learn better why they are worth loving? Were this the time and the place, it would be pleasant to go through these passages, and set forth their beauties. But three out of the four psalms which we have studied already contain one or more of them, and from these three psalms let me in conclusion gather up some five words on lovingkindness.

‘ See what surpassing lovingkindness Jehovah hath shown me ;

Jehovah heareth when I call unto him (iv. 8 ; cf. I John iii. 1).

‘ For this let all men of love pray unto thee in time of distress,

When the flood of the great waters is heard’ (xxxii. 6).

‘ Thou wilt not leave my soul to Hades,

Neither wilt thou suffer thy loving one to see the pit'

(xvi. 10).

' Preserve thou my soul, for I am one that loves'

(lxxxvi. 2).

' For thou, Lord, art good and forgiving,

*And rich in lovingkindness unto all that call upon
thee' (lxxxvi. 3).*

CHAPTER XIV.

PSALM LXXXVII.¹

THE 86th psalm, as we have just seen, is not one of the most original psalms, and yet no one but a spiritually enlightened man could have entwined such tender aspirations and sweetly humble petitions. To friends of missions the psalmist ought to be especially dear, for he has given us in the 9th verse one of the most distinct prophecies of the conversion of heathen nations. God, he assures his fellow worshippers, has made all nations of the world, and not merely the Israelites. Consequently there must be a kind of filial yearning after God in the minds of the heathen. They are prodigal sons who have wandered far from their Father, but a day is coming when, as the 22nd psalm says, 'all the ends of the earth shall remember themselves, and return unto

¹ See *B.L.*, pp. 118, 119, 479.

Jehovah.' We cannot doubt what that day is, according to the intention of the psalmists. It is the day when in the fullest sense God shall take up His abode among men, and 'judge' or rule the world in righteousness. And so in the 'Revelation of St. John,' immediately before the seven last great plagues, the faithful who stand by the glassy sea, and sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, remember and quote the words of the Hebrew psalmist.¹

Not unfitly then did the editor of the third Book of the Psalms (Ps. lxxiii.—lxxxix.) place this psalm immediately before the 87th. It was a neglected work of great spiritual beauty which needed an honourable place in the temple-hymnbook, and so he not only called it a 'prayer of David,' but placed it between the 85th (like itself, a psalm in praise of lovingkindness²) and the 87th—the psalm of the catholic Church. Let us now pass on to the 87th psalm, regarding it as an inspired poetic sketch of the happy results of the conversion of the nations.

The author of this brief but fascinating hymn is one of the temple-singers, who, devoted as he must be to his own class, looks forward with joy to the enlargement of the sacred choir by the admission of

¹ Rev. xv. 4.

² 'Lovingkindness and truthfulness' occurs both in lxxxv. 10 and lxxxvi. 15.

foreigners. This however is not the main subject of the psalm, though it forms a leading feature in the description. The idea which fills this holy minstrel with enthusiasm is the expansion of the Church of Israel into the Church universal. Just as the nation of Israel became transformed into the Jewish Church through the chastenings of the exile and the single-hearted devotion of the reformers Ezra and Nehemiah, so in time to come the Church which arose out of a single nation should swell and grow till it embraced within its ample limits all that was capable of regeneration in the family of man. The psalmist was thoroughly penetrated with the great truths revealed through the Second Isaiah, who, though an admiring student—in Babylon—of the First Isaiah, had risen to heights of almost Christian insight far beyond the elder prophet.¹ Listen to these words uttered by the Second Isaiah in the name of Jehovah :

‘Fear not, O Jacob, my servant ; and thou, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon the thirsty, and streams upon the dry ground : I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring : and they shall spring up among the grass, as willows by the watercourses. One shall say, I am Jehovah’s ; and another shall proclaim the name of

¹ I put aside for the moment the disputed passage Isa. xix. 18-25.

*Jacob ; and another shall write on his hand, Jehovah's, and give for a title the name of Israel.'*¹

Observe, it is not merely the natural 'seed' of Jacob to which the outpouring of the Spirit in the latter days is promised, but the whole body of believers, increased by the accession of converts from heathenism. 'God is able,' as our Lord told the Jews, 'of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.'² And since it is not permissible to efface altogether the distinction between poetry and prophecy—the psalms being historical documents and implying a certain historical situation—we must assume that an initial fulfilment of this and other prophecies had already taken place when our psalmist wrote. An accession of proselytes must already have gladdened Jewish believers, even if only on a small scale. It was a common Jewish saying in later times that a proselyte is like a new-born child, and our Lord alludes to this when he tells Nicodemus that 'except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'³ We find the germ of this noble phrase, so full of deep meaning to ourselves, in this old temple-hymn. Let us read the psalm. To readers who have not the key it is

¹ Isa. xlv. 2-5. Comp. the preceding Study. ² Matt. iii. 9.

³ John iii. 3. The Septuagint begins ver. 5 differently from our text, *Μήτηρ Σιών ἐπεὶ ἄνθρωπος*, on which Theodoret compares Gal. iv. 26.

obscure. But to those who have already devoted some attention to the style of the psalms, and who have also a sympathy with the progressive elements in the Jewish Church, the forest-shades are pierced through and through by the rays of a summer sun.

*‘ His foundation on the holy mountains,
The gates of Zion Jehovah loveth
More than all the dwellings of Jacob.’*

So far the psalm might have been written in the days of Josiah, who first fully carried out the principles of the great prophets by centralizing the worship of Jehovah at Jerusalem. To this most pious king, as the instrument of God’s purposes, we are indebted for that spirit of fervent love for the house of God which breathes in so many of the finest psalms. The psalmist continues,—

*‘ Glorious things are spoken of thee,
Thou city of God,’*

viz. by the prophets, such as Jeremiah and the two Isaiahs, especially the later Isaiah, from whom I have quoted one striking passage already. Then Jehovah Himself is introduced, making a solemn declaration respecting five important nations well known to the Jews. A prophetic excitement runs through the words which embody it, and renders them obscure.

*‘ Rahab and Babylon I mention among them that
know me ;*

Behold, Philistia and Tyre with Ethiopia—

Each one was born there !

And concerning Zion it shall be said,

“ Each and every one was born in her,”

And he, the Most High, shall stablish her.

Jehovah shall reckon, when he registers the people,

“ Each one was born there.” ’

Rahab, as all agree, means ‘pride,’ a name given by both Isaiahs to Egypt. Babylon is either Chaldæa, or some one of the nations which succeeded to its imperial position. ‘Them that know me,’ means ‘them that have entered into covenant with me’; only those can know God to whom He reveals Himself by a special covenant. ‘Each one was born there,’ in ver. 4, means each of the five nations mentioned just before. Then comes the climax in ver. 5. In the preceding verse the nations are regarded as unities, but in ver. 5 we catch a whisper of the individualizing conception of religion hinted at by Jeremiah and thoroughly expounded in the Gospel. The most glorious thing which has been spoken of the city of God (viz. by the two Isaiahs) is that there is neither Egypt nor Babylon, nor even Israel, in the great catholic Church of the future, but that of each Egyptian and Babylonian it can be said that he was regenerated or born into a new life in Zion.

There are two prophetic passages which illustrate

this. One is at the end of the 19th chapter of Isaiah (vers. 24, 25):

'In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth: for that Jehovah of hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.'

The other is in the Second Isaiah, in chap. xlv. 14:

'Thus saith Jehovah, The gains of Egypt, and the merchandize of Ethiopia, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to thee, and they shall be thine; . . . they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, (saying,) Surely, God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God.'

These passages show that it was not a sudden lightning-flash which irradiated the psalmist's mind; his insight was due to the blessing of God upon a long-continued and, if I may say so, critical study of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit had sharpened this early saint's perceptions; he passed over all those passages in which Israel from a spiritual point of view is put too high and the other nations too low, and singled out those of purest and noblest intuitions, which anticipate all but the most advanced evangelical truth. And may we not, must we not, believe—that the same blessing is waiting for us, if we will

only search the Scriptures with an earnestness and a disposition to take trouble equal to that of the psalmist and his fellows? 'Be very confident that the Lord has yet more light and truth to break out of His holy word,' are the words of a Nonconformist, in the old, sad days of persecution, but they are echoed by one whom all Churches and sects delight to honour, and who once ministered in my own venerable cathedral, Bishop Butler, the author of the *Analogy*.

The psalmist's insight was not perfect. Though he lived six hundred years after David, he still retained a shred of the old narrow nationalism, which for so many centuries enveloped and protected the germ of higher truth. He was still subject to one of those illusions by which God in all ages has educated His disciples, and which, by His providence, He at last safely and tenderly dispels. Few even of the psalmists could as yet have borne those far-reaching words of Christ, 'The hour cometh when neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father.'¹ Much less could the few proselytes who felt the attraction of the holy revelation of Jehovah have entered into a saying so totally

¹ John iv. 21. There were probably a few who were reaching out after this great truth (see Studies on Psalms xxiv. and lxiii.), but our psalmist was less advanced than they.

opposed to the accepted ideas of the whole non-Jewish world. A visible centre of the true religion both seemed and was necessary, so long as truth was but as a stranger and pilgrim in this lower world; nay, have we not seen that, while the forces of evil predominated greatly over the good, a similar religious centre was providentially given to the mediæval Western Church? But God was already preparing both the Jewish Church and its proselytes to do without this centre. Already synagogues had arisen—places for prayer and reading the Scriptures, which were the true predecessors of our Christian churches. And already that excessive regard for sacrifices as the only correct form of public worship was being greatly reduced by the new love for the Scriptures and for prayer—in the Second Isaiah we even find that great saying, endorsed by the Teacher of teachers, ‘My house shall be called’ (not a house of sacrifice, but) ‘a house of prayer for all nations.’¹ So that even though the temple remained pre-eminently sacred, yet its sacredness was in some sense shared by each of those scattered houses and riverside oratories where ‘prayer was wont to be made.’²

But consider what faith it implied in these men of alien races to come to the puny mountain of Zion for religious instruction, and to recognize its temple as

¹ Isa. lvi. 7 (probably post-Exilic).

² Acts xvi. 13.

the most sacred spot upon the earth ! We do not hear as much about faith in the Old Testament as in the New. But if any sacred books, or even psalms, had been specially written for proselytes, we should no doubt have found in them much kindly recognition of those heroes of faith. Later Jewish doctors admitted that Abraham their father himself was but the first of the proselytes, and who knows not those noble verses in the Epistle to the Hebrews which throw such a flood of light on the spiritual import of Abraham's migrations ?—

' By faith Abraham, when he was called, . . . went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a land not his own.' ¹

It was just such faith when the converts from the heathen nations broke the countless ties which bound them to great and ancient religions and became the humble disciples of a poor and lowly Israelite. And what was it that made Jerusalem, in the days between Ezra and our Lord, the spiritual capital of a Church that already began to be catholic ? It was a simple yet fervent doctrine of God, supported by a few great but simple historical facts. If we, reading the psalms, which are the best historical documents we have of Jewish religion after the captivity, are inexpressibly

¹ Heb. xi. 8, 9.

moved by the combined sweetness and power of the spirit which breathes in them, how much more must those prepared minds among the heathen which saw Jewish religion in action, have been drawn towards it as by invisible cords? The doctrine without the facts would never have attracted them. Grand as is the conception of God, the Almighty, the Allwise Creator, in the Second Isaiah, it is rather fitted to depress than to encourage, without the attendant assurance of the call of Israel to be God's favoured servant. If we could see God even afar off in that awful greatness revealed to us in the 40th chapter of Isaiah, 'the spirit would fail before him, and the souls that he hath made.'¹ But when the prophet adds to this revelation of God as the Creator, that of Jehovah who hath 'called his servant Israel in righteousness,' and will 'hold his hand, and keep him,' and will 'set him for a light of the nations, to become God's salvation unto the ends of the earth,'² then a strange new feeling of reverent love comes upon the sympathetic reader. And so must it have been in antiquity. Awe at the infinite power of Israel's holy God must have become softened into humble filial trust. And if we turn back to that passage in the Second Isaiah which I quoted before, we find that the Gentile converts who at first fall down before Israel with the half-superstitious

¹ Isa. lvii. 16.² Isa. xlii. 6, xlix. 6.

prayer, 'Surely God is in thee,' rise in the next verse to the perception that the one true God, the Almighty, is also a Saviour, able and willing to deliver those who put their trust in Him.¹

But there is a still higher interest attaching to this beautiful psalm. It is not only a historical document, illustrating the progress of our mother the Jewish Church, it is a virtual prophecy—more strictly, it is a lyric reflexion of earlier prophetic pictures—of the Church of the latter days. It foreshadows the gradual expansion of the original Jewish Christian Church into a catholic Church of many divers races, fraternally united in Jesus Christ. '*For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek : for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon him : for, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*'² These are the words of an apostle of Christ. They are anticipated by the prophets and by the psalmists. Yes ; there is a germ, though only a germ, in our psalm of the conception of corporate and yet personal union with Christ which we find in St. Paul. Each of the five foreign nations spoken of in ver. 4 were, or should be, born again, says the psalm, to a higher life in and through Zion. But in the next verse we are told that besides this each member of these several nations should, in his individual capacity,

¹ Isa. xlv. 14, 15.

² Rom. x. 12, 13.

be born again in and through Zion. This brings us, as I have said, very close to the declaration of Christ to Nicodemus, and it suggests that the true theory of the Church had already loomed on the horizon of this Hebrew saint. Only those who have themselves laid hold on the Saviour can unite together in the Church of the redeemed. In short, we receive the grace of the Spirit, as individual human beings, and not in virtue of belonging to a nation or to a Church by the accident of birth. How all-important this truth is! A great preacher, of long experience, especially among the educated classes, has said, that 'there are men who are tossed all their lives on a sea of misgiving and perplexity, for want of a real new birth.'¹ Nominally indeed we are all 'children of the kingdom,' but really, unless we live and act as citizens of Zion, how can it be said of us that we have been 'born there'? '*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*' There is a fleshly, natural religion, and there is a spiritual, supernatural religion; and unless we know in an increasing degree what this latter means, it is only too doubtful whether we have ever really been born in Zion. And if any one refers me to the psalmist in justification of his want of assurance on this point, I reply that the psalmist's words on Jehovah's registering of the regenerate ought

¹ Dean Vaughan.

to be supplemented by those which I have quoted from the Second Isaiah, who distinctly says, that the proof that we are of the spiritual Israel is given by ourselves. ‘*One shall say, “I am Jehovah’s,” and another shall even (as a willing slave) write upon his hand, “Jehovah’s.”*’ In other words, he whose one aim in life is to obey God’s law from love and in the strength of the Spirit of Christ may be sure that He who registers both nations and individuals will say when ‘the books are opened,’ This man was born there. Let us each ask ourselves therefore, Is this my single aim? Do I serve God from love, or—which is the germ of this happy state,—earnestly and constantly desire to do so? If it is, what should make me afraid?

‘To love Thee, Saviour, is to be
Cheerful and brave and strong and free,
Calm as a rock ’mid striving seas,
Certain ’mid all uncertainties.’¹

I have said that the true theory of the Church had loomed on the horizon of the psalmist. Certainly the idea which he had formed of it was not a logically accurate one. The order of vers. 4 and 5 suggests that nations are in some sense brought into the city of God before individuals. This is in accordance with the religious development of ancient Israel, in which

¹ Miss Macready, *Devotional Lays*.

the corporate sense of spiritual life preceded the individual. The normal course in evangelical Christendom is different. We are saved as individuals, but our salvation is incomplete until we share a common and united life with our brethren. Indeed, the very first impulse of the saved soul is to seek the society of those who have been 'in Christ' before him. They have need of him, and he has even more need of them. Such is God's appointment. 'He that findeth his life shall lose it.' Not individual but social happiness is the end set before us by our Redeemer—social happiness which cannot be complete as long as one of our fellow men is a stranger to it, or seeks it in false ways—social happiness which means the combination of all God's human children in the delighted service of their heavenly Father. And of this combined life the natural type is the city. A Hebrew psalmist may speak of Jerusalem as the type, but this is only because the capital of the post-Exile Church seemed to him, by a pardonable illusion, to be a model city, and because he knew that Jerusalem (that is, the Church which dwelt there) was, for the good of the world, as 'the apple of the eye' to Jehovah.¹ Long afterwards, a saintly non-Christian philosopher (M. Aurelius) speaks in full sympathy with prophets and apostles, of the world itself as the city of God—he too had

¹ Zech. ii. 8.

learned that the object for which man was made was that social life of mutual help and common obedience to the laws of God, of which the city is the type.

‘Glorious things are spoken of thee, thou city of God,’ says our psalmist. It is God’s own ‘foundation upon the holy mountains.’ Jerusalem’s girdle of hills is to his sharpened perceptions a symbol of the heavenly heights, and of that love-directed strength which is more durable than the heaven itself. But the glory of Zion would be incomplete, unless the ‘city of God’ were also the city of the world. Not that all individuality is to be crushed out of the non-Jewish nations, any more than we desire this for the infant Churches of India and Africa for which English lives have been so freely spent. National differences are to continue in the ‘city of God,’ but these differences will cease to be divisive; the union of the federated peoples is to be not less close than that of the several quarters of the ‘well-compacted’ city—Jerusalem.¹ In short, the catholic Church is to become identical with that human race for which in due time Christ died, and the primary work both of the national Churches and of each of their members is so to commend the principles of the city of God,

¹ Cf. Rev. xxi. 3, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be *his peoples*’; and ver. 24, ‘And *the nations* shall walk amidst the light thereof’ (viz. of the holy city). See Revised Version.

that every child of man may eagerly embrace the new citizenship.

Is the task hard? Too hard indeed it is for human strength ; not the greatest of political philosophers has been able to counteract sin, and devise a perfect, moral city-life. Feeling this, noble-minded dreamers have bidden us return to nature, and make it our aim to restore the idyllic conditions of the garden of Eden. But we 'have not so learned Christ.' He has called us to shrink from no task because it is hard, for '*I am with you*,' saith He, '*all the days*' (words of sweetest comfort for tired workers) ; that is, 'I am the master-builder of the new Jerusalem.' In remote antiquity (said a Greek myth, true in idea, if not in fact) the walls of the city of Thebes rose to the divine music of Orpheus. But 'our highest Orpheus' (as an English prophet of the latter days has finely said) 'walked in Judæa, eighteen hundred years ago : his sphere-melody, flowing in wild native tones, took captive the ravished souls of men.'¹

'A simple reed by Syrian waters found
From human lips took a celestial sound :
Through it strange melodies our Shepherd blew,
And wondering, wistful ones around Him drew.
Of heavenly love, with cadence deep it told,
Of labours long to win them to the fold,
Of bleeding feet upon the mountains steep,
And life laid down to save the erring sheep.

¹ Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, bk. iii., chap. viii.

O loving Shepherd, to that gracious strain
 We listen and we listen once again ;
 And while its music sinks into our heart,
 Our fears grow fainter and our doubts depart.' ¹

Gracious strain, indeed ! Without it, how should the 'prisoned soul' burst the bonds of sin and fly to join other kindred spirits in building up the fair city of God ? But, as our English prophet says again, 'being of a truth sphere-melody, (it) still flows and sounds, though now with thousandfold accompaniments, and rich symphonies, through all our hearts ; and modulates, and divinely leads them.' And though, if we look at its performance, that union of Christian hearts which we call the Church has produced comparatively little that is worthy of the supernatural glory of its origin, yet, if we look at its promise with eyes sharpened by the Spirit of Christ, we can discern, underneath the pettiness, and the prejudice, and the folly, and even the sin, which mar the Church's record, bright gleams and sometimes as it were tropical outbursts of heavenly light and love which are the reflexion of the gates of pearl and the golden streets. The seer of Patmos 'saw the holy city Jerusalem coming down new out of heaven.' ² This is a form of expression highly characteristic of Hebrew idealism. We perhaps may with equal justice think of the new

¹ Wilton, *Lyrics Sylvan and Sacred*.

² Rev. xxi. 2 (R.V. marg.).

Jerusalem as fashioned in the course of the ages upon this our earth, and then, for its 'perfect consummation and bliss,' transported into that ideal world, where the boldest aspirations are the most fully realized and the strongest faith receives the largest reward. Just as we say that Christ's Church must, in spite of appearances, possess unity, because He asked for it, so we must believe that the city of which the Church is, under Christ, the builder is growing in heavenliness as the years roll on, and that we are surely and swiftly moving towards that great dedication-festival, when, in the words of the psalmists, we shall 'sing unto the Lord a new song,'¹ and when,—

*'They that sing as well as they that dance (shall say),
All my fountains (of life, and joy, and peace) are in
thee (O Zion).'*²

Then shall we indeed, according to that fine primitive use of the phrase, celebrate our true 'birthday,' wherein we, with 'the nations of them that are saved,' shall be delivered for ever from temptation and sin and sorrow, and be 'born again' into the perfect life.

¹ Ps. xcvi. 1 ; cf. Rev. v. 9.

² Ps. lxxxvii. 7, R.V.

CHAPTER XV.

PSALMS CXIII.—CXVIII.¹

THE lawgiver of whom later ages formed so high an opinion, that they might seem to be groping their way to a conception of Christ,² or at any rate those who after him formally or informally continued his work, took up and sanctified certain customary Semitic festivals, which had their origin in the changing phenomena of the seasons. By being connected with the great deliverance which made Israel, ideally at least, a Church-nation, they were converted into picture-lessons of the mighty works of Jehovah, which, as a psalmist said, God 'commanded Israel's forefathers to teach their children.'³ But as time went on, each of these festivals received a still richer meaning through the new associations attached to it

¹ See *B.L.*, pp. 16-19.

² See the apocryphal book called the *Assumption of Moses*.

³ Ps. lxxviii. 5.

by history ; and the Feast of Tabernacles in particular, as it came round autumn by autumn, revived grateful recollections of two of the greatest events in the post-Exile period, viz. the rebuilding of the altar of burnt offering, in B.C. 538,¹ and the recovery of the public means of grace, B.C. 165, when Judas the Maccabee again rebuilt the altar, and the faithful Jews rejoiced eight days, to compensate for the miserable Feast of Tabernacles which they had so recently kept 'in the mountains and in the caves like wild beasts.'² The 118th psalm has been explained by Ewald from the former and by Hitzig from the latter event. Certain, or at least highly probable, it is that it was Simon, the second and more ideal David or Solomon of the Israelites, who reorganized the temple service with special regard to the psalmody, and appointed the group of psalms called the Hallel, or Song of Praise (Pss. cxiii.-cxviii.), to be sung on the eight successive days of the Feast of Tabernacles. Read these psalms in the light of this great period, and they will gain vastly in colour, warmth, and meaning. Read the 118th psalm in particular, and all that may have shocked you in it becomes pathetically intelligible. Can you not imagine the deep thankfulness and impassioned love to God with which, as long as the memory of these events was recent, the priests,

¹ Ezra iii. 1-6.² 1 Macc. iv. 44-47, 56 ; 2 Macc. x. 6.

shaking their festal branches, moved in procession round the altar, chanting again and again the 25th verse,

' Ah, Jehovah ! save (still) ;

Ah, Jehovah ! send prosperity (still) ' !

I must confess however with some regret, at least from a Church point of view, that Psalm cxviii. is not throughout as congenial to Christianity as could be wished. The Huguenots, who used it as a battle-song, showed thereby that they knew not ' what spirit they were of.'¹ And if even Luther, to whom evangelical doctrine was so dear, and who was free from the excessive regard for the Old Testament displayed by the French Protestants, called this psalm, at one great crisis in his fortunes, his ' proper comfort and life,' he could only do this by qualifying some verses of it (see vers. 10-12) with an infusion of later Christian truth. The Authorized Version indeed does not permit the English reader to realize fully the fierceness of the original expressions.² Reuss and Bruston, translating for students, are less considerate ; the one gives, ' Je les taille en pièces,' the other, ' Je les massacre.' So that coming fresh from the tender meditations in Psalm cxvi. (written perhaps a little later by some

¹ Luke ix. 55.

² The margin, however, gives ' Heb. *cut down* ' ; R.V. renders, ' *I will cut them off.*'

one who had not gone into battle with 'the high praises of God in his mouth and a two-edged sword in his hand'), the Anglican worshipper is conscious of an effort as he reads or sings it in the congregation.¹ The Biblical student however is delighted with the psalm, because it gives us a contemporary record, not indeed of the facts, but of the feelings of the period. Judas the Maccabee was a divinely inspired hero, but he was as ruthless as, if we may follow Joshua x., xi., Joshua was of old to the Canaanites. He was a very Elijah in prayer (see the prayer reported in 1 Maccabees iv. 30-33), as well as in 'jealousy' for the name of Jehovah; but he had not the versatility by which the ancient prophet passed from the declaration of awful judgments to the relief of the necessities of a poor heathen woman. But how can we blame him for his limitations? Ardent natures could not restrain themselves when the future of the true religion was at stake. The 'flashing zeal' of Judas and his friends purified the moral atmosphere, and for good and evil affected subsequent periods. 'Fanatics' is too mean a title for those who sang these words:

¹ It is significant that none of the accounts of Christ's purification of the temple suggest that He thought of the purification of Judas; the quotations are from passages of a more spiritual tone than Ps. cxviii. Soon afterwards He *does* quote from this psalm, but with reference to another subject (see Mark xii. 10, 11). We must not, however, overlook the expressions of humility and faith which are not wanting in Ps. cxviii. (see especially vers. 13-18).

*'Should not I hate them, Jehovah, that hate thee?
And loathe them that rebel against thee?
I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them mine enemies.'*¹

Once, and once only, in the New Testament the Maccabæan times are referred to; it is in the noble eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Does the writer blame the Jews for the fierceness and bitterness of their struggle? No; he forgets it, or, rather, sees underneath it that absolute, rock-like faith which, as he says, is 'the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen.'

Now I think that we English people are to be blamed for our ignorance of these stirring times. In spite of Handel's grand musical reminder, it is but seldom that we find in our literature such a happy reference to the Maccabæan story as that made by Edmund Burke in these words:

'I am as sure as I am of my being, that one vigorous man, confiding in the aid of God, with a just reliance on his own fortitude, would first draw to him some few like himself, and then that multitudes hardly thought to be in existence would appear and troop around him. Why should not a Maccabæus and his

¹ Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22. Written obviously before the Maccabæan revolt, but well expressing the thoughts of its leaders. Prof. Reuss (art. 'Asmonäer' in Herzog's *Realencyclopädie*) heartily admits that Judas the Maccabee stands alone in his greatness among fanatics.

brethren arise to assert the honour of the ancient law, and to defend the temple of their forefathers, with as ardent a spirit as can inspire any innovator to destroy the monuments, the piety, and the glory of the ancient ages?'¹

It is possible that our popular religious literature (which few men can profess to know thoroughly) might yield a few striking allusions.² But I can myself only recall the late Bishop Wordsworth's stirring exhortation to resist the removal of the real, or supposed, safeguards of Christianity in England, in two sermons preached at Cambridge, as I believe, in 1871.³

If the truth must be told, this unacquaintance with one of the great epochs in the history of our religion is of purely Protestant origin; we ignore the Books of Maccabees equally with the glorious Book of Wisdom, because they form part of the Apocrypha. On this, as on some other points, the greatest mediæval poet shows a wider spirit than many moderns. Among Dante's references to the Maccabees, who does not admire that noble passage where, in the cross of Mars, next after Joshua, shines resplendent 'the

¹ Burke, 'Letter to Wm. Elliot, Esq.' (*Works*, vii. 366); quoted by the late Bishop Wordsworth.

² Since the above was written, Prof. Church and Mr. Seeley published their stirring novel, *The Hammer*, which deserves to be widely read.

³ *The Church of England and the Maccabees*. Second edition, 1876.

lofty Maccabee' ?¹ It is not that he neglects the heroes of the Scriptures correctly called canonical ; few poets have known the simple Bible-story better than he : but he has a conception of the religious history of Israel which, though of course not critical, is yet as complete as our own too often, from our neglect of the Apocrypha, is incomplete. The services of the Church helped him in this. In the time of St. Augustine² the Latin Church had already sanctified the kalends of August as the spiritual ' birthday of the Maccabees,' by which was meant, not the entrance into rest of the five heroic sons of Mattathias, but that of the seven sons of a fervently believing mother, whose death of torture is related in 2 Maccabees vii.³ Probably this great episode in the story of the Maccabees was all that was generally known in the Christian Church. ' The seven Maccabees ' seems to have been a common phrase ; and to these martyrs, according to St. Augustine, a basilica was dedicated at Antioch, ' ut simul sonet et nomen persecutoris et memoria coronatoris.' How popular the festival (*πανάγγυρις*) of the Maccabees was at

¹ *Paradise* xviii. 37-42. The dramatic scene (so familiar to us from Raphael) of the discomfiture of Heliodorus forms the subject of another striking passage. William Caxton has also a fine reference to Judas Maccabæus in his preface to our English epic of *Morte d'Arthur*.

² See Sermons CCC. and CCCI. (*Opera*, ed. Ben., V. 1218, &c.).

³ Cf. Mr. Rendall's note on Heb. xi. 35.

Antioch we know from St. Chrysostom, whose works contain two sermons 'on the holy Maccabees and their mother.'¹ St. Gregory Nazianzen has also left us an oration on the same subject, largely based on the so-called fourth Book of Maccabees.² All these eloquent Fathers (to whom a Syriac-writing theologian—St. Isaac of Antioch—may be added) dwell much on the essentially Christian character of these heroes of faith—none however as forcibly as St. Augustine, whose words may be here quoted as applying to others besides the martyrs specially commemorated on August 1st:

'Nec quisquam arbitretur, antequam esset populus Christianus, nullum fuisse populum Deo. Immo vero, ut sic loquar, quemadmodum se veritas habet, non nominum consuetudo, Christianus etiam ille tunc populus fuit. Neque enim post passionem suam cœpit habere populum Christus: sed illius populus erat ex Abraham genitus. . . . Nondum quidem erat mortuus Christus; sed Martyres eos fecit moriturus Christus.'³

The early martyrdoms of the Syrian persecution have found no *vatem sacrum* in the Psalter. The

¹ *Opera*, ed. 1636, I. 516, &c., 552, &c.; cf. V. 972 (Serm. LXV.).

² Orat. XXII. (*Opera*, ed. 1630, I. 397, &c.). The oration is very fine, but the preacher draws very largely from 4 Maccabees, which Freudenthal has shown to be most probably a Hellenistic-Jewish sermon.

³ *Opera*, ed. Ben., V. 1218, 1219.

next scene in the history is the flight of the aged priest Mattathias and his five sons to the desert mountains, where the faithful Jews gather round them. According to St. Chrysostom this situation is presupposed in Psalm xlv. Many modern students lean to this view, and though the psalm falls short of the faith in the resurrection so nobly expressed by the martyrs according to 2 Maccabees vii., yet there are the gravest reasons for doubting whether the doctrine of the resurrection was altogether accepted in the Jewish Church as early as B.C. 167. Certainly Psalms cxvi. and cxviii. do not give the impression that these writers were wholly emancipated from the fear of death. The 'rest' spoken of in cxvi. 7 is probably that of an assured tenure of earthly life, not that of which Richard Baxter writes in the lines :

' Lord, it belongs not to my care
Whether I die or live ;
To love and serve Thee is my share,
And this Thy grace must give.'

The psalmist may have advanced beyond his fellow singer, who cried out in the agony of his soul, less as an individual than as a Churchman, to whom a share in the 'felicity of God's chosen' ¹ is far more than isolated happiness,—

¹ Ps. cvi. 5 (Prayer Book).

*'Return, Jehovah, deliver my soul,
Save me, for thy lovingkindness' sake.
For in Death there is no mention of thee ;
In Sheól who will give thee thanks ?'*¹

But not many days before he did ejaculate the first part of his 'bitter cry' (see Ps. cxvi. 4), and it is only the presence of a sort of undertone in some parts of Psalms cxvi. and cxviii. which permits us to hope that the writers had now and then been visited by glimpses of the fair prospect opened in the 16th and other kindred psalms. I refer to such passages as cxvi. 15 :

*'A weighty thing in the sight of Jehovah
Is the death of his loving ones' ;*

and the refrain which recurs in Psalm cxviii.,—

'For his lovingkindness endureth for ever' ;

on the former of which St. Chrysostom finely remarks, connecting it with ver. 12, 'He includes it among God's bounties, that not only the life, but the death of the saints is a matter for which He cares.'

Yes, the Maccabæan psalms do not at first present a very consistent psychological picture, and it is only by thinking ourselves into the peculiar mental situation of the faithful Israelites that we can at all understand them. Not only are different views of death suggested by different passages, but different

¹ Ps. vi. 4, 5.

estimates of the religious capacities of the heathen. 'Israel could not altogether disown the new spirit of friendliness, not to polytheism, but to polytheists,' which the second part of Isaiah had communicated to the post-Exile Church. Let the reader work out this idea for himself in connexion with the history of the times ; I should fear to try his patience were I to enter upon so fruitful a topic. Suffice it to add, that if Psalm cxvii. was chanted as a preface to Psalm cxviii., when this newly written hymn was introduced (by Simon?) into the liturgical services (it does at any rate form part of the Hallel), the harsh expressions in Psalm cxviii. become greatly softened, and Luther may not have been so far wrong in selecting this psalm for his own special Scripture.

Let us now sum up a few of the leading ideas of Psalm cxvi.

(a) St. Augustine begins his exposition of the Psalm at the wrong end ; he spiritualizes too much, applies the words too directly to the joys and sorrows of the individual. 'Let the soul sing this psalm,' he says, 'which, though at home in the body, is absent from the Lord ; let the sheep sing this, which had gone astray ; let the son sing this, who had been dead, and became alive again, who had been lost, and was found.' But evidently the trouble from which the grateful speaker has been delivered is the danger

of physical not spiritual death, and he utters his thanksgiving in the name of the Church. I hasten to add that the reason why he values life is, that he as an individual shares in the work of the Church, which is (see Ps. cxviii. 17) to 'tell out the works of Jehovah' to those who as yet indeed know Him not, but who, as prophecy declares, shall one day be added to Jehovah's flock. Even where the psalmist says, 'I will call (upon him) all my days' (ver. 2), he means chiefly, 'I will join my prayers to those of the congregation,' as is plain from the other context in which the same phrase occurs (ver. 13). The psalm is therefore a strong though unconscious protest against dwelling too much on our own individual joys and griefs. Deliverance from selfishness is most surely and perfectly attained by absorbing ourselves in the cause, not of any party or sect, but of the kingdom of God.

(b) What has the psalmist to tell us of the 'name' or revealed character of Jehovah? Three attributes are mentioned: His compassion, His righteousness (or strict adherence to His revealed principles of action), and His readiness to answer prayer. The divine lovingkindness is not referred to expressly in this psalm (which differs in this respect from Psalm cxviii.). But the divine 'righteousness' is only the other side of 'lovingkindness' (*khesed*), and the 'love' of Jehovah's 'loving (or, pious) ones' (*khasīdīm*) pre

supposes that of Jehovah. The fact however that the psalmist lays so much stress on Jehoyah's 'compassion' is significant. There are moods in which, either from conviction of sin, or from the overpowering consciousness of our own weakness and misery, it is a solace to recall the infinite pity and sympathy of our Creator. The psalmist was probably in one of these. He had said 'in his panic' that 'all men were liars' (ver. 11), i.e. that none of the powers of this world was ranged on his side. But thoughts of Him who is 'the father of the orphans and the advocate of the widows' once again (cf. Pss. lxxviii. 5, cxlvi. 9) more than reconciled Israel to his loneliness. 'If God be for us, who can be against us?'

But what can Israel say to the seemingly conflicting evidence respecting the divine righteousness? The Church-nation has indeed been saved from extermination, but at the cost of precious lives. The law promised a long and happy life as the reward of obedience, and yet true Israelites have had to choose between life with transgression and death with fidelity to conscience.¹ This is the difficulty which so greatly harassed the author of the 44th psalm.² Does our psalmist throw any light upon it? Incidentally he does, by the declaration that it is no light matter³

¹ 2 Macc. vii. 2.

² Ps. xlv. 17-19.

³ 'It is an expense that God delights not in,' is Jeremy Taylor's comment on the word 'precious' in the A.V. of our psalm.

with God to permit the lives of His faithful ones to be cut short (ver. 15). If the promises of the law have been so strikingly unfulfilled, it is because the Church is now fully prepared for the higher revelation which is on its way. There is a plan in the dealings of Jehovah both with the Church and with individuals, and His righteousness is not less closely linked with His wisdom than with His lovingkindness.

The third attribute specially referred to in Psalm cxvi. is Jehovah's readiness to answer prayer. And whose prayer is permitted to reach His ear? A more complete answer could be given from other psalms; the special contribution of the writer of Psalm cxvi. is, that those whom Jehovah preserves are 'the simple,' i.e. those who feel that they 'lack wisdom,' and that, as Jeremiah says in one of his prayers, 'it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.'¹ Simplicity, in this sense of the word, was specially called for at the terrible crisis through which the Church was now passing. No other principle but the simplest faith could possibly have inspired either the prompt resolutions or the fearless courage of the glorious six years of Judas the Maccabee. But would it be true to say that Jehovah only 'preserveth the simple'? Does He not also answer the prayers of those who feel that they have already received the

¹ Jer. x. 23.

earnest of God's promised gift of wisdom, and that they cannot be any longer 'children,' but must 'grow up unto him in all things, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ'?¹ Next to and because of Jehovah, the psalmist, who humbly ranks himself among the 'simple,' doubtless loves the book of revelation. But is it not the special property of this volume that, rightly used, it can 'give wisdom and understanding unto the simple'?² And would not St. Paul reproach us, as he reproached the Corinthian Church of old,³ for our slowness in obeying the call of Providence, when some too dearly loved relic of 'simplicity' has to be exchanged for a comparatively clear intuition of the truth? Gladly as we listen to those who, like St. Augustine and Christopher Wordsworth, bid us learn from these Christians before Christ how to die for the truth, we decline to accept in all points the definition of Christian truth current in any one age; for that would mean, not strength, but weakness of faith relatively to that Spirit of wisdom who, as Christ promised, is guiding disciples into all the truth. The word 'faith' ought not to become a symbol for intellectual narrowness, and blindness to the leadings of Him who, not without storms and revolutions, 'reneweth the face of the earth.'

¹ Eph. iv. 13, 15.² Pss. xix. 7, cxix. 130.³ 1 Cor. iii. 1.

Psalms cxvi. and cxviii. are the most striking psalms of the Hallel. But other members of the group deserve to be studied more in connexion with the Maccabæan period. When was the description in Psalm cxiii. 7, 8 more exactly verified than in the elevation of the previously little known Asmonæan family to the rank of 'princes of God's people'? Even if the psalm were written somewhat earlier, yet its words received their fullest historical justification in that surprising event. And does not the threefold division of the faithful in Psalm cxv. 9-13, and the emphasis laid there on the one sufficient helper, Jehovah, justify the irrepressible conjecture that this psalm, like the 118th, is Maccabæan? Why should Christian ministers hesitate to answer in the affirmative? Truly, if they can honestly do so, they will find it become all the easier to use these psalms for purposes of edification. If the story of the Maccabees is as important even now as Christopher Wordsworth assures us that it is, would it not be a great help to students if they could illustrate it from the most certain of the Maccabæan psalms? When will some English scholar, with the gift of interesting the people, seize the noble opportunity of usefulness presented to him? The Jews at any rate have long since set us a good example by appointing Psalms cxiii.-cxviii. to be recited on each of the eight days of

the two great historical feasts of the second temple, the Tabernacles and the Dedication.¹ Is it reverent in us who are under such deep obligations to the Jewish Church to set at naught this example? Surely the lesson of faith in God was never more urgently needed, both in Church and in State, both in thought and in practice than to-day. And from whom can this lesson be learned better than from those psalmists whose works can be shown to possess definite historical references? For these poets express not merely the mood of the individual, but the stirrings of the mighty heart of the Church of God.

NOTE ON PSALM CX.

The 118th psalm naturally suggests the thought of the 110th. Both psalms are distinguished from most of the other members of Book v. by the comparative clearness of the historical situation. Both belong to a period of great warlike religious enthusiasm, and both contain certain details which are (as I believe) most easily accounted for on the supposition of a

¹ The Maccabæan festival of the Encænia (John x. 22) was, in fact, a kind of supplementary Feast of Tabernacles. See 2 Macc. i. 9.

Maccabæan origin. But whereas at any rate the post-Exilic origin of Ps. cxviii. is universally acknowledged, that of Ps. cx. is still exposed to much contradiction. Until the fundamental principle of this contradiction has been refuted, it will be vain to hope that either of the rival theories as to the post-Exilic origin of Ps. cx. will receive a fair consideration. What, then, is this principle which stands in the way of critical progress? It is a theological one, and we may state it briefly thus—Jesus Christ, being the ‘teacher come from God’ and even ‘the Son of God,’ cannot be liable to error. This of course needs such verification as is possible. We test it therefore by the facts of the Gospel-narrative, and more especially those of the Synoptic Gospels. These facts justify us in supposing in the Christ a unique superiority both to moral error and (so far as this was necessary for the discharge of the Messianic functions at that time and place) intellectual error. Let us next inquire whether it was necessary that the Messiah should at that period have clear intuitions as to the date and authorship of the psalms. Take for instance His controversy with the Pharisees as to the sonship of the Christ (Matt. xxii. 41–45). Our Lord’s object was to get the Pharisees to see that no mere son of David nor king of Israel could fulfil the highest prophecies respecting the bringer of the divine salva-

tion. Would it have promoted this to have asserted (contrary to the universal belief) that Ps. cx. was not written by David himself, nor even at a time when the hope of a perfect king of the Davidic family was vividly realized? Surely not. The question, 'What think ye of the Christ?' was such a one as Socrates might have put in his dialogues; it was designed to bring out what lay involved in the interpretation of Ps. cx. 1 adopted by the Pharisees themselves. Our Lord made no declaration as to His own belief or knowledge. He may have accepted the current view of the schools, or, being such a keen critic of Jewish traditions on other points, He may have seen the futility of the received Biblical criticism, and rejected it in so far as it was opposed by His own spiritual tact. Our knowledge of the inner life of Jesus Christ is necessarily so slight, that we cannot venture to speak positively of His attitude towards the current criticism. But it is by no means inconceivable that the ascription of Psalm cx. to the same author as Psalms xvi., xxii., and lxix. may have struck this most spiritual of interpreters as violently improbable. I would ask in conclusion whether the present theological controversy as to the admissibility of any other theory respecting the origin of Ps. cx. than that alluded to in Matt. xxii. 43 may not be closed by the acceptance on both sides of such a compromise as this,

viz. that while the liberals grant the bare possibility¹ that divine oracles like those in Ps. cx. 1, 4 may have been delivered by Gad or Nathan to David, the conservatives on their side admit that the poetical setting of such oracles must have been considerably modified between the times of David and of Simon the Maccabee. An able writer in the *Church Times* doubts whether liberal scholars 'have done justice to the difficulty which now exists of verifying traditions about the original authorship of poems handed down through successive generations amongst the members of musical guilds, and liable from time to time to such modification as we see exemplified in Psalms xiv. and liii.'² Being myself in the habit of speaking of the psalms as of recent origin 'in their present form,' I may fairly retort that conservative theologians need still more to consider this great truth—viz. that pre-Exilic psalms in order to be adapted to post-Exilic use would necessarily have to be modified or even recast. In its present form Ps. cx. can scarcely be conceived of either as Davidic or even as pre-Exilic. The more ancient its basis is thought to be, the more extensively modified must the superstructure be. I confess however that, if I am asked whether the

¹ It is no more than this. The psalm is perfectly explicable without assuming an antique basis. Historically and philologically, the evidence seems to me to point away from David, and to be fully satisfied by the theory of a Maccabæan date.

² Review of Gore's *Bampton Lectures*, Dec. 11, 1891.

words 'unto my Lord' (Ps. cx. 1) can in the mouth of David have meant 'unto that far greater king who is at some future time to follow me, and to be Jehovah's perfect vicegerent,' I must reply that the historical evidence points in an opposite direction. The speaker here is evidently not himself a king, but refers respectfully to the reigning king as 'my Lord.' These introductory words cannot possibly be interpreted Messianically.

For my own part, I humbly venture to think that God is leading us to a better Messianic interpretation of the Old Testament than we have received from the first Christian ages, and I seem to see the first outlines of it in the works of free but devout students of critical exegesis. The Christ within the Church is teaching us a few more of those 'many things' which the disciples of Jesus in the olden time 'could not bear.' That dwelling on words and phrases of the Old Testament which was characteristic of the early times must be reduced to very modest proportions; it is the general spirit and tendency of old Hebrew thought and feeling which we shall value, rather than the real or supposed correspondence of Old Testament words and phrases to New Testament facts. This change of attitude is, I believe, in accordance with the mind of the Master, if indeed He really meant to utter those striking words, 'Ye search the

Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life,¹ and they are they which testify of me ; and yet ye are not willing to come unto me that ye may have life ' (John v. 39). Neither eternal life nor that truth which conduces to the intellectual appreciation of life can be had from that minute but petty investigation of the Scriptures which was practised by the Jews. 'Come unto Me,' is the call of Jesus to the student of theology as well as to the convinced sinner. Converse with the Christ will settle the grave question as to the nature of His inerrancy during those few short years so incompletely chronicled. Few mistakes can be so great as to waste our precious energies in disputing about words which have no doubt their interest, but cannot be explained on dogmatic theological principles.

Yes, the words of Ps. cx. 1 have their interest. They introduce a psalm full of a lofty religious enthusiasm which glorifies the period to which it belongs. The psalm is not indeed a prediction of the Messiah ; if it were so, it would stand alone in the Psalter. And yet it is 'germinally Messianic.' Like the author of Ps. cxlix. (see ver. 7) the psalmist

¹ ' *In them.*' It was the later Jewish doctrine that the Torah was the tree of life, the fruit of which conveyed immortality. ' *Ye think.*' Our Lord rejects this inadequate opinion. So 'What *think ye* of the Christ ?' implies that He is not the son of David in the sense in which they think the Messiah is so.

regards the exploits of the Maccabees as the beginning of that 'world-judgment' which will introduce the perfect, the Messianic age. The highest honour which he can put upon his much-loved prince, Simon the Maccabee, is to represent him as the initiator of a series of victories which will at last verify the grand idealistic description in the second psalm. There was illusion in this, but has not Frederick Robertson taught us that Providence leads men on through paths of illusion, not breaking the illusion till the truth which nestled within it was ready to be revealed in all its soul-satisfying splendour?

May I ask a candid and repeated consideration of my discussion of Ps. cx. in *B. L.*, pp. 20-29, 49, 482 (linguistic evidence)? See also pp. 34-36, 68, 200, with my commentary (1888), Driver's *Introduction*, p. 362 (note ¹), and my suggestions in the *Expositor*, April, 1892, pp. 238-239.

88668

The Gresham Press,
UNWIN BROTHERS,
CHILWORTH AND LONDON.



